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# THE MINOR MORALIST

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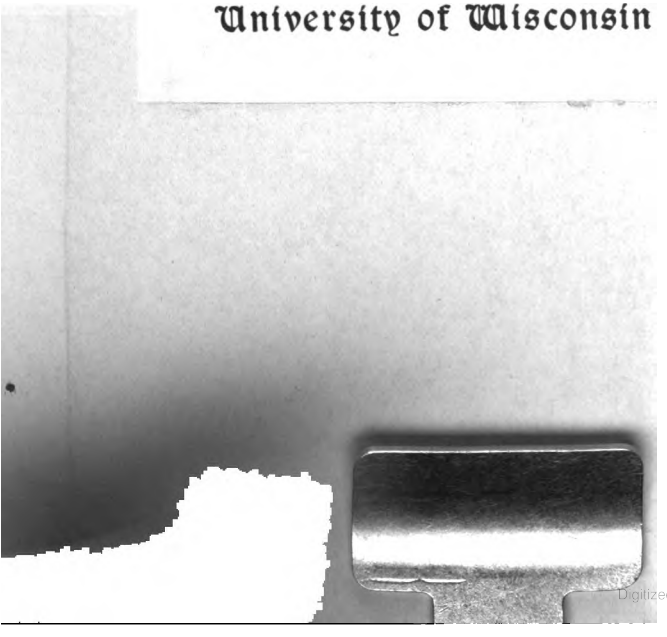

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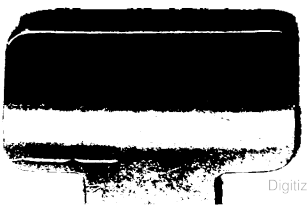

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# THE MINOR MORALIST

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# THE
# MINOR MORALIST

## SOME ESSAYS ON THE ART OF EVERYDAY CONDUCT

BY

MRS. HUGH BELL

AUTHOR OF

"THE ARBITER," "CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS AND ENDINGS"

ETC. ETC.

LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD

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*TO MY CHILDREN*

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# A PLEA FOR THE MINOR MORALIST



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# A PLEA FOR THE MINOR MORALIST

A BOOK containing thoughts on behaviour, although it may be dull, is perhaps not so actively displeasing as the behaviour to which no thought is given, and which from sheer indifference offends at every step against what we may call the minor moralities of social intercourse. There is no attempt made here to deal with any comprehensive scheme of morals. It is not for minor moralists to seek on broad lines for any common basis of ethics, or to formulate the principles of any special creed: enough if they can deal to some purpose not with the seven deadly sins but with the hundred and fifty peccadilloes of which the daily sum makes life almost as disagreeable. Here is no question of light-



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ing a beacon on the lofty summits: what is proffered is but a hand-candlestick which may show some of the details of the level road. For it is not enough to know when we set out the general direction in which we must bend our steps; we ought also to be warned whereabouts on the road there are pitfalls and stumbling-blocks — stumbling-blocks, moreover, which when we fall over them hurt not only ourselves but other people. We are apt to deceive ourselves by thinking these obstacles so absurdly insignificant that it is hardly worth while to warn the next comer of their existence. We tell him, to be sure, of the place where there is a large boulder across the road which he must take heroic measures to circumvent; but it seems hardly worth while to put up a danger-signal to warn him where there are pebbles which may presently get into his shoe. Yet it would be well for those whose paths lie along the beaten track of life that looks so deceptively smooth in the distance to realise in time where some of its

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trivial habitual difficulties are likely to lie. This suggestion is, no doubt, the most obvious of truisms; but it is difficult for any striking originality to be displayed in connection with this subject, since all general propositions as to conduct, if worth enunciating at all, have probably been enunciated already.

It is, of course, of the difficulties and friction of daily life in our own country and in our own time that I am speaking here. That friction, if there be any, may present itself under an entirely different aspect to beings of another race, continent, and civilisation. I cannot tell what the domestic difficulties of the Persian or Hindoo may be; and I am not concerned to find a remedy for them. I am concerned with those who live in the hustling West, and find it hard to go through daily life without jar and shakings. And in order to do so the more vigilance is needed, in that the worship of speed on which our existence is to a quite horrible extent based to-day is insensibly acting on our characters, and bend-

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ing our moral code into new and strange shapes; causing us, on the one hand, to develop new and disagreeable peculiarities, on the other, to elevate to the pinnacle of Virtues a whole list of qualities which are merely highly expedient in the arrangement of our modern life, simply because they help to carry it on with the least possible delay. We teach our children, therefore, that it is a virtue to accomplish a thing in the shortest time possible: to rise very early, to be punctual, to be ceaselessly occupied. Idleness, indeed, is from the earliest age, in every picture-book, the brand of the evildoer. We may not all of us in our hearts agree with this: we may secretly doubt whether this point of view is really more commendable than that of the Oriental whose code is exactly the reverse. He does not insist on doing everything as quickly as possible, he does not even approve of it. He feels no obligation to be in time to the moment. Why should he? he has wisely ordered his

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existence so that he has an ample margin of time in which to be, if he chooses, what we call Late. He does not admire the unceasing energy of those who are never idle; this, indeed, can be but a reproach to one for whom hours of so-called idleness are the quiet blessed spaces in which he has time to think, to contemplate his relation to the universe, and to try to penetrate the great mystery of that relation.

Perhaps if we too had more leisure for contemplation, and were better trained to use it, we should then be better able to straighten out some of the strange tangles in which our code has become involved. We should be able to explain why, although the spiritual side of our nature is the part of our being to which we suppose ourselves to cling the most, we are agreed, in England, at any rate, that it is not to be discussed or brought into question on ordinary occasions of life: it is to be used as a rope thrown out to us when we are drowning, but not as a

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rail to help us along the road we tread every day. But if we cannot justify to ourselves this attitude, which appears to be inevitable in the conditions of this country and of this time, we may at any rate find some relief in the fact that we have no alternative but to accept it and make the best of it: born under the prosaic law of action, and not of thought, we are not called upon, or even allowed, to decide what standards we will choose to have presented to us. Since we live in the West, then, let us, for the daily convenience of our own life and that of others, obey the code to which we are bound by the conditions of time and space; for these are the conditions with which we have to deal, this is the life we have to lead, and not that which other people led five hundred or a thousand years ago, nor that which is being led by others five thousand miles away. We need to make, each one for ourselves, some everyday working code, formulated in a way which shall bring it to the level of our mental vision.

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Happily there need here be no question of formulating any special creed; we may safely assume that whatever the formula, the general work-a-day rules which should govern our conduct towards our fellow-creatures remain much the same. But we find it difficult sometimes to apply to those work-a-day rules the admirable generalities with which we have probably all been furnished by our spiritual teachers in our youth, before it occurred to us to inquire of ourselves where and how they should have any bearing on our daily actions. We have not all of us minds rapid in readjustment which can at once from some allegory or parable of fine comprehensiveness evolve a practical guidance. For most of us the extent of our possible achievement is to comply as best we may with the commonplace precepts into which, for each one, the parable is in haphazard fashion translated by our individual conscience and experience—fortified, should we have any misgivings, by the vague consciousness of the

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moral heights we could doubtless scale if we choose.

The wisdom of the ages is our inheritance, the cardinal virtues our daily companions; or at least we believe they would be, if we found any cardinal occasion. Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude — Faith, Hope, Charity—with their attendant train of generosity, unselfishness, sympathy, and all the rest—these are the attributes which we imagine quite honestly to be part of our available equipment: our consciences may slumber securely under the guardianship of so stately a host. We should stare with amazement if our belief in them were questioned; we acclaim them with admiration as the mainsprings not only of the ideal conduct, but of our own. But in the form in which the ordinary mortal has to deal with them they present a strangely less attractive aspect. It does not seem easy to get a firm hold of the tiny fragment of eternal Justice necessary to recognise one has been

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mistaken in some small household matter—of Prudence to be silent in season—of Temperance to refrain from fussing about food—of Fortitude to endure uncongenial companions. It may seem hardly worth while to bring the loftier teaching to bear upon such minor results as these. But it does bear upon them nevertheless, whether we will or no; and we shall do far better frankly wisely and unheroically to recognise the fact that the peace and harmony—and therefore the welfare—of the world depend to an incomparable degree upon the minor moralities of every day.

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# ON THE BETTER TEACHING OF MANNERS

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# ON THE BETTER TEACHING OF MANNERS

A GREAT deal of time is spent in these days in discussing what is the best equipment for success in life, and those of us who have the heavy responsibility of deciding important issues for another generation pass anxious hours in weighing the comparative merits of such and such branches of learning, as preparation for such and such careers. But we contrive to omit completely from that deliberately formulated scheme of instruction the thing that probably matters most; and that is the manner, as well as the manners, in conjunction with which that excellent equipment is going to be used, through which it is going to be interpreted, and on which will most certainly depend its ultimate success.



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However well stored your mind may be, however valuable the intellectual wares you may have to offer, it is obvious that if your method of calling your fellow-man's attention to them is to give him a slap in the face at the same time, you will probably not succeed in enlisting his kindly interest in your further achievements. And yet we all know human beings, of good parts and of sterling worth, who contrive by some unfortunate peculiarity of manner to give us a moral slap in the face every time we meet them, simply because they did not receive any systematic teaching in suitable demeanour at a time of life when such teaching is most important. It is a pity that the word "deportment" should have become indissolubly associated in our minds with the absurdities and excellencies of the immortal Mr. Turveydrop, as it now suggests mainly an exaggerated elaborateness of bearing of whose associations we cannot get rid. Through all the ages we have been confronted by a series of maxims about manners and de-

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meanour, which are just far-reaching enough to comfort us with the sense of having an unexceptional code to hold by, precluding the need of any further search for the truth, just as the person who has a favourite remedy which has always proved sufficient is not inclined to try a newer nostrum recommended by his more advanced friend. There is plenty of excellent grounding in elementary manners to be had in the nursery and the schoolroom. The extraordinary fertility of invention with which a child will find ever-fresh ways of transgressing every human ordinance is kept in check and corrected by those about him, who are constantly saying, "Don't do this," "Don't do that," until, insensibly guided by this handrail of prohibitive maxim, the child learns in a rough-and-ready way to bear himself more or less well at this stage of his passage through the world. Unfortunately, however, the more grown-up faults of manner do not generally show themselves until the offender has passed the age when they might



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without loss to his dignity fitly have been corrected. It is easy to tell a boy of twelve not to annoy other people by drumming with his feet on the floor during dinner; but it is more difficult to tell him when he is twenty not to make himself offensive by laying down the law. That difficulty of admonition increases as the years go on, and it may safely be asserted that the fault of manner which is not cured at twenty-five will still be there at seventy-five. And, alas! in half a century there is time to offend a great many people. Surely it would be quite possible to obviate this danger by timely and systematic instruction. We take a great deal of trouble to impress on a young child certain quite arbitrary rules of demeanour, which are so constantly reiterated and insisted upon that he gradually takes them as a matter of course, and obeys them automatically for the rest of his life, until it would be utterly impossible for him, arrived at manhood, so to fly in the face of his early training as to tie his table-

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napkin round his neck at a dinner-party, to put his knife in his mouth, or to attack his gravy with a spoon. Why should it not be possible to have a course of second-grade instruction in demeanour, so to speak, which should in its turn be as thoroughly taught as the primary one, as insensibly assimilated and automatically obeyed? But it does not seem to occur to most people that this is necessary. Our usual plan, or rather want of plan, is to furnish the young with some stray haphazard generalities, and then consider that we have done enough. There are few things more dangerous than the half-truths — necessarily and obviously half-untruths as well—which we thrust into the gaps of our code of conduct in a makeshift fashion, and thus exclude truer or more complete ordinances. And so, without a misgiving, we proceed to tell young people that "Manners maketh man," or "Good manners proceed from a good heart," and then expect that they themselves should fill in the details for their own daily guidance.

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We might as well tell them the formula of the law of gravitation, and then expect them never to tumble down.

And we let them learn by experience—surely the most tedious and painful form of acquiring knowledge—at their own expense and that of others. We let them fall into one pitfall after another, and scramble out as best they may, scratching themselves and others in the process, and perhaps making enemies of dozens of their fellow-creatures who would otherwise have been well-disposed. We allow them to try by practical experiment whether it is by being pompous, offhand, or patronising that you can make yourself the most disagreeable, and how long other people will enjoy talking to you if you are looking the while with ill-concealed inattention over their shoulder. And yet these are things which it is important to know, these are things which should be deliberately taught, and not left to chance.

It is a platitude to say that as regards

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the average mass of human beings the question of failure or success in life is almost entirely determined by their personality. I am not speaking of those whose transcendent gifts of any kind must inevitably lift them conspicuously above their fellows even when accompanied by the drag of an unfortunate manner, but of the average mortal sufficiently well equipped to carry him through successfully, provided that all the other conditions be favourable, and that he be not hindered by quite unnecessary stumbling-blocks that a little trouble and forethought might have removed from his path. An ingenuous investigator put forth, I am told, some time since, a circular inquiring into the causes of failure, a copy of which was sent round to all the people who might be supposed to have good reason to know the answer. History does not say what were their feelings in receiving it. But however plausibly they may have managed to explain why they had not succeeded in doing all that they had desired

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to do, we may surmise that they did not in nine cases out of ten put their finger on the real cause, namely, that of having been afflicted with an unlucky manner, or manners, which had stood persistently in their way all through. They had taken, no doubt, a very great deal of trouble to learn many things that they thought would be useful to them; but this thing that matters so very much they had left out altogether. Manners may not "pay"—to use that ugly expression—in an examination, perhaps. But once that by dint of studying history or the classics the examination has been passed and the career entered upon, a previous study of manner and manners will be found to pay very well indeed. It may mean that the road of life is made smooth instead of rough, easy instead of difficult; that the traveller is helped along it by the encouragement of others, instead of being hindered by their dislike. Such a study, however, but rarely finds its place as part of an accepted curriculum. During the

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long and frequent conversations on education with which mothers are wont to beguile the time when they meet one another in society—these conversations occasionally take the form of an alternative and competitive recital of the achievements of each mother's offspring —you will hardly ever hear of manner or manners being taken into account in making educational arrangements for Jenny or Polly, or I should rather, in these days, say Sybil or Dorothy. On the contrary, you will probably discover that such branches of learning as they are pursuing are being acquired under conditions in which manners will probably be entirely overlooked. Dorothy is learning music abroad, living in a family whose absolute respectability has been carefully inquired into, but where it is not likely that there will be much observation, or much criticism, therefore, of the hundred little departures from grace of bearing into which young people are apt to slide. Sybil, who has a stronger mind, is learning the classics at a high

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school, under the care of a teacher who, excellent though her certificates of knowledge may be, has absolutely no time to turn her own attention or that of her pupils to minutiæ of demeanour. But if we were even to hint this in veiled terms to a mother who is anxiously planning how she may do the best in her power for her daughter, she would probably contemn us for attaching importance to the small things of life than to the big ones. But there is no reason why the earnest study of music or the classics should not be compatible with daily and hourly training in manners as well, if that branch, as well as the others, has been considered in selecting a teacher. Of course we all agree that big things should come before small. Where we are at variance is in deciding which are the big and which are the small; and in my opinion they are not always divided aright. Give a thing a small name and hang it, in fact; and it is unfortunately the people who are most entitled

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to command our respect by the sincerity and diligence of their work and aims who are apt to put aside the deliberate study of the minor graces of life, as being the things of least importance.

It is a matter of regret that the earnest, the high-minded, the elect thinkers and doers of the world, their energies concentrated on loftier aims, should so often practically if not explicitly contemn the "undue" importance—the very word begs the question—given to what they call trifling observances, on the ground that time and energy are thus diverted from the larger issues. I would diffidently point out that none of these small observances are incompatible with lofty aims and earnest thought. On the contrary, I will venture to assert that not only are they compatible with them, but that every form of good and earnest endeavour will be incalculably furthered by attention being paid to certain details of manner which some people consider trifling, although others call them

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essential. In this case, as in others, the looker-on may see most of the game; and the idler standing by may perhaps realise more clearly than the active and strenuous workers whose minds are full of wider aspirations, how greatly their possibilities of usefulness may be minimised, how much the influence of their goodness may be weakened, by being presented to the world under a crude and unattractive aspect. It is quite a mistake to think that goodness unadorned adorns the most. It should have as many adornments as possible, in order that the outward graces may correspond to the inward, in order that the impulse of those brought face to face with it may not be one of involuntary recoil, first from the unattractive manner, and then, perhaps, unconsciously to themselves, from the admirable virtues that underlie it.

I go, for instance, to visit a noted philanthropist. I am not there on business, so to speak, and I ought to accept that she is not

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professionally called upon to love me; and I feel it is absurd that it should be a factor in my opinion of her real worth that she should forget to pour out my tea, so busy is she haranguing me in a dictatorial and unsmiling manner. I ought to remember that she would hold a cup of water to the lips of a pauper more tenderly than a cup of tea to mine. I ought to remind myself that the manner so displeasing to me has been acquired when exhorting and instructing some less favoured by fortune than I, whose horizon she may thus incalculably have widened. And yet I confess that I find myself wondering if it would not have been possible for her to combine both forms of excellence, and to be deferential, courteous, solicitously hospitable to the well-to-do, as well as helpful and admirable towards the badly off; and why, when great and noble ideals of conduct were being placed before her, some of the minor graces of demeanour should not as a matter of course have been imparted as well.

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It is foolish that we should in our intercourse with a fellow-creature be biassed by superficial deficiencies, and thus lose sight of essential excellencies. But we are foolish, most of us—that fact we must accept, however much we should like to think otherwise; and if we honestly search our experience and our memories, we shall realise how much we are liable to be influenced by things which appear insignificant, we shall recall how slight an incident has sometimes produced an unfavourable impression that is never wholly erased. I remember an instance of this which struck me very vividly. A septuagenarian of dignity and position, Sir X. Y., happened to meet at a public gathering Mr. Z., another magnate of his own standing, full of years and worth. Mr. Z. was anxious to enlist Sir X. Y.'s interest in a certain scheme, and to obtain his co-operation and pecuniary support. And he would doubtless have succeeded, for Sir X. Y., an urbane old man, albeit with a clear con-

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sciousness of his own deserts, was entirely well disposed, and advanced with outstretched hand to meet Mr. Z. with cordiality. But, alas! at that moment Mr. Z. happened to see some one else by whom his attention was suddenly diverted, and, all unwitting of his crime, he shook hands with Sir X. Y. without looking at him, thereby losing in that one moment of thoughtlessness the goodwill of his interlocutor, his kindly interest, and his possible help. Mr. Z. had almost certainly been taught in his youth always to give his right hand instead of his left when shaking hands with people, and he had probably learnt it so thoroughly that it would never have occurred to him to do anything else. But he had apparently not been taught also to look his interlocutor in the face at the same time, as if it gave him pleasure to meet him. And yet this supplementary ordinance might have been just as easily and thoroughly taught as the first rule, if it had occurred

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to any one that it was necessary and advisable to teach it. We could all of us, probably, cite many instances of the same kind. Mrs. A. and Mr. B. being both interested in a certain school, Mrs. A. went to see Mr. B. to discuss with him some point in the management of it. Suddenly Mr. B. caught sight of an open letter lying on the table in front of him, and he took it up and looked mechanically through it as she spoke. The result was, that although he was in reality more than willing to meet Mrs. A.'s wishes about the school, his manner quite unintentionally produced a feeling of unreasoning resentment in her, and she was far more angry with him for agreeing inattentively with her views than she would have been if he had differed from them after listening to her attentively and courteously. All this means an absolutely unnecessary expenditure of energy. Mrs. A., being given the wrong bias at the beginning of the interview, was then annoyed with herself for being

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annoyed with Mr. B.: the irritation in her manner communicated itself to his, according to a law of nature as definitely ascertained as that of the propagation of the waves in the ether, and the question they had met to discuss was settled with an incalculable amount of friction, which might have been entirely avoided. It arose purely from Mr. B.'s defective training in manners. He had probably been taught as a definite precept of conduct in his youth, obeyed ever since quite unconsciously without a separate effort of will or intention, to get up when a lady entered his room, and not to sit down with his back to her afterwards; but it would have been well for him if he had also been taught not morally to turn his back upon her by reading a letter while she was speaking to him of something else. This is one of the most exasperating and most prevalent forms of bad manners, and one which reappears in an infinite variety of shapes. Mrs. E. went one day to see

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Mrs. F., who is renowned for the rare gifts of her mind, heart, and intelligence. Mrs. E. was prepared to be impressed by her, to admire her, to be guided by her. But, behold! during the whole of their interview, in which, indeed, Mrs. F.'s utterances were all they were expected to be, she entirely impaired the effect of them by looking at herself in the glass all the time she was speaking. And somehow, even if unreasonably, that trifling manifestation outweighed in the mind of her hearer all the brilliancy and charm of her talk, and those few moments of intercourse, so eagerly anticipated, remained in the mind of Mrs. E. as an acute disillusion. Mrs. F. would probably much have regretted this result, if she had known it; for even brilliant and superior people, I imagine, would prefer not to produce an impression of disillusion; and in this case, as in most others, it might quite well have been avoided. Mrs. F. ought to have been taught betimes, as every one should be taught,

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not to look at her own reflection at the wrong moment; to be able to pass a stray and unexpected mirror without looking in it, and, especially never to watch herself in one while talking to other people. It is not wicked, of course, to look in the glass at the wrong moment. It is merely absurd. But why should we be even absurd, if it can be avoided? There is no reason why people should be either ridiculous or unpleasing in their social relations, if they could only be taught, at an age when they are still teachable, to curb the indiscretions of their outward manifestations; if only an onlooker were allowed an occasion to cry *Casse-cou!* as in the French game of our youth, when a blunderer whose eyes were bound was about to stumble over some unseen obstacle. I once heard a boy of nineteen, in conversation with a listener of more than twice his age, preface a quotation by saying: "As was well said by a great and good man, *whose name you may perhaps have heard. . . .*' (The



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italics are mine.) I longed to cry "*Casse-cou*, young man, *casse-cou!*" for I felt that in the listener's mind that excellent youth, a devoted son and brother, honest and upright, and inwardly everything that could be desired, was being tried, judged, and condemned for ever on account of his condescending manner. For affably to assume that a middle-aged interlocutor might perhaps just have heard the name of a writer with whose works the young gentleman himself was apparently well acquainted, was exactly one of the things I would have young people taught to avoid. Indeed, at any age, it is a safe rule never to appear to think that a subject of which one is speaking requires explaining, or to assume that a piece of knowledge quite familiar to oneself is not equally so to other people.

Oh that these things might be taught calmly and urbanely, on general principles! Oh that it were possible to have a sort of night-school for adults, where certain obvious platitudes

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concerning the conduct of human intercourse might be learnt, without being either given or received with the evil animus of personal application! What a different aspect they would present to the hearer, and how much more ready he would be to assimilate them! For there is no doubt that the personal bearing of the question makes all the difference. It is quite conceivable that even the most universally accepted and revered of general maxims, such as "Thou shalt not steal," say, or "Waste not, want not," would, if levelled pointedly at oneself, take quite another aspect from that which they present when offered impersonally as part of a general code of morals. This bringing in of the personal element, and its unsatisfactory results, is one of the great drawbacks to the direct teaching of manners as at present attempted in the family circle, and neutralises the effect of it just at a stage when such teaching, if undertaken and carried out successfully, would be of inestimable advantage to the learner. It

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is obvious that this is likely to be so. Parents, even those who are more or less alive to the importance of demeanour, content themselves while the child is young in instructing him, as we have said above, with great thoroughness in the elementary rules. That being successfully accomplished, it does not occur to them to consider or to discourse upon any wider aspects of the subject, until they suddenly discover one day that, the time of childhood being passed, the manners of the grown-up young man or woman are not all that their fond parents imagined they would be. This deficiency being disagreeably and crudely revealed by some peculiarity or lapse of manners, and flying in the face of some idiosyncrasy of the parents' own, is therefore rebuked by them with much more animus than the occasion warrants. For be it said incidentally,—it is a conviction sadly forced upon one as experience ripens,—that the parents' standard of their children's wrongdoing is occasionally but a standard

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of different doing, and it is no wonder that young people should often rebel against so inperfect a code of morals.

This is not the place to enlarge on a subject on which so very much still remains to be said, the best way of bringing about satisfactory relations between parents and children. I will only say that it seems to me that here, too, we are apt to underrate the importance of manner and manners, and that when some years ago the subject was vigorously discussed in print, the people who were all for having recourse to heroic remedies, latchkeys, Wanderjahren, and separate incomes, were going too far afield for the solution of the problem. I believe that if older people were more careful not to weaken the effect of important and necessary admonitions by a series of daily and hourly minor rebukes, often uncalled for, and arising from irritability as much as from conviction, they would not find themselves nearly so helpless at the moment of essential and

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inevitable divergence of opinion. The demeanour of the younger generation is a good deal criticised in these days, and I cannot deny that much of the adverse criticism may be true. I am ready to admit that the manner of some young men—not of all—is conceited, familiar, totally wanting in distinction and in chivalrous courtesy. But this, perhaps, is partly due to the fact that the manner of some young girls—not of all—is characterised by an unpleasing decision, by a want of dignity and reserve, by an ugly sort of slap-dash assurance, and by a total want of delicate half-tones in the atmosphere that surrounds them. I deplore all these regrettable manifestations; I deplore that there should be sons who come down to breakfast with a scowl, and daughters who contradict their mothers; and I sympathise with the grievance, if not with the clamour, of the people who write articles in magazines and newspapers to complain bitterly of the manner of the present day, and especially of the want

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of deference shown by the young to older people. At the same time I fancy that statistics would show that these articles are all written by the generation that is offended by that want of deference. Young people do not, as a rule, write articles on the manners of older ones. That, at least, we have so far been spared. But I fancy that if they did, and put forth their views with the candour with which their own manners are criticised, we should find that they in their turn were often very unpleasantly affected by our manner. If they were always addressed courteously and smilingly, never admonished irritably—and of one thing I am quite sure, that the wrong moment to rebuke a fault is when it has just been committed — never silenced, or snubbed, or sneered at, however much their utterances may seem at times to demand such treatment, they would probably in their turn feel inclined to reply more amiably, and we should perhaps not hear of so many despairing discussions and inquiries

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as to the best way of getting on with one's family. But instead of this it is too often received that in the intimacy of the home circle it is allowable and even advisable to dispense with the small adornments of every-day courtesy. The influence of such a code on the grace of daily intercourse must necessarily be disastrous. Some children I once knew used, whenever they handed a thing to one another, to do so combatively, with a violent push, which invariably succeeded in infuriating the recipient. The same unpleasing effect is produced when children of a larger growth continue the process, and push their remarks or their arguments home with a momentum which arouses an unreasoning fury in their interlocutor. We all know what it is to argue with such people. It is like trying to write one's opinions on sandpaper instead of on a fair white sheet. It is a crime to allow a human being to grow up with such a manner.

If urbanity were persistently taught and

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practised in the home, there would not be so much to learn, and especially to unlearn, with regard to intercourse with the world at large. People would not then have two manners, one to use in public, and one in private. There would be less self-consciousness and less affectation, for these arise from trying to do a thing of which we are uncertain, to assume a manner which we have imperfectly acquired.

"Take care of your friends and your relations will take care of themselves" is the implied motto which governs most social relations. Greet the visitor with a smile, but come down to breakfast in your family without one. Acquiesce with polite alacrity in the stranger's commonplace remark about the weather, but reply to your brother by a flat contradiction. And a flat contradiction does not necessarily mean that the speaker earnestly dissents from his interlocutor's opinion, but only that there is a sort of automatic spirit of contradiction prompting

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members of the same family to dissent from a statement because it is made by some one else. This may sound a small thing, but it is on such myriads of small foundations that the fabric of life is based. And do not comfort me, pray, by saying that the people who are abrupt and rude to each other have a heart of gold underneath, and in a case of emergency would rise to the occasion and display a depth of feeling as gratifying as it is unexpected. For would that moment entirely make up for months and years of rudeness? I should have thought not.

I am not saying, of course, that in every respect the code of behaviour should be the same at home as abroad — that would be absurd; only the difference, it seems to me, should lie in the direction of there being less reserve in the family circle than among strangers, but not less gentleness and courtesy. It would not be in the least a fault of manners, for instance, for a child to fling himself on his mother's lap and throw his arms round

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her neck, although it would be very ill-mannered if he were to do the same to a visitor. But if he were to bang the door in his mother's face, that would be just as ill-mannered and just as inadmissible as if he had banged it in the face of a stranger. Often I have seen a mother, put to shame by her children's rudeness to a visitor in this respect and others, scold them roundly and unavailingly for continuing to do the ugly thing in public that she had tolerated their doing every day in the family circle. I saw the other day a young girl, gently born and anxiously brought up, coming into a drawing-room at an afternoon party just as a dowager was leaving it. To my amazement, the girl, instead of stepping back and allowing the older woman to pass her, pressed forward with all the impetus of her youthful vigour, so that the departing guest was fairly hurled back into the room, and had to wait to go out until the newcomer had pushed her way past her. This sort of thing ought not to

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be possible. And the responsibility for it lies entirely on the shoulders of the parent; for it is evident that if the girl had been taught always to step back, and to yield the way to older people, she would have done so on that occasion also, gracefully, and as a matter of course, and have thereby made a pleasant impression on the mind of the beholder, instead of a distinctly unpleasant one.

We are told that in the days of Mrs. Chapone there stood in the courtyard of a boarding-school at Brighton an empty coach, in order that the young ladies—it was part of their daily course of study—might practise getting in and out of it without showing their ankles. I am not advocating that this practice should continue. I fear that some of the modern pastimes to which young women are addicted necessitate showing a good deal more of their ankles, to put it mildly, than the contemporaries of Mrs. Chapone would willingly have beheld. But I do think it would be an excellent plan, although I fear

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it might be attended with some practical difficulties, if an empty railway carriage could stand in every courtyard, with a crowd of intending passengers to practise upon. Then people might study the art of getting in quietly, courteously, and in their turn, instead of pushing their way past in order to get in first, declining to make room for other people, and generally indulging in all the numerous forms of bad manners that railway travel seems to induce. Such an exercise would also be found useful as a guide to behaviour at drawing-room entertainments and other occasions of the same kind where people ardently desire to secure the best seats.

How delightful it would be, though perhaps such a project is only a rosy dream, if a class could be formed, just as classes for learning the minuet have been formed, for instruction in demeanour in a drawing-room, showing in practice as well as in theory how to move through it with ease and dignity, how to behave when listening

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to music, when playing cards, or round games! Demeanour at games is one of the things that the best-behaved fall short in, and unless it be taught in the home, where there are countless opportunities of doing so, it will never be learnt at all. I have been stupefied sometimes, when watching in a country house some drawing-room game of the kind that has to be decided occasionally by the verdict of the players, to see the people that I have been accustomed to consider the most punctiliously polite develop the most surprising acrimoniousness, rudeness, and self-assertion. If this is not remedied in childhood it will never be cured. One feature of the excellent work known as the Children's Happy Evenings Association is that it teaches the art of playing together pleasantly and harmoniously to poor children whose only notion of a game up till now had been to cuff or abuse the one who got the better of them. I only wish this training could be extended to other circles, and that some of

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those very people perhaps, who have been playing with the children at the East End, could, when back in their own surroundings, have people to play with themselves, and to teach them the art of politeness over a game of cards or of letters. Perhaps some philanthropic dukes and princes could in their turn give up an evening a week for that purpose.

In conclusion, then, what we want is some scheme by which a complete training in demeanour should form part of the regular curriculum. The method of tuition, instead of, as at present, consisting of haphazard scoldings, should consist of a systematic course of instruction in the higher branches of manner or manners, to follow as a matter of course the elementary grounding. It is unreasonable to expect, as we do at present, that young people arrived at a given stage of existence should know by intuition that which we have never deliberately tried to teach them. Let us help them, therefore, to acquire betimes certain general maxims

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of conduct, which should be contained like other branches of knowledge in a book compiled for the purpose. I attach great importance to their being in a book. The mere fact of seeing such maxims — at present handed on to us, if at all, by oral tradition, as if we were Druids, and that in an infinite variety of imperfect forms, according to the transmitter — clearly defined and set down in print, would place them in quite another aspect, would increase our confidence in them, and would be of great help to us in carrying them out. And since there is nothing that teaches a thing so thoroughly as trying to impart it to others, the constant use of this handbook would be probably of inestimable value to those who teach from it as well as to those who learn. It must have come within most people's experience to realise the influence that has been exercised by some home-grown precept of behaviour that they have been accustomed to hear from early years. How often you hear a man

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or woman say when explaining some course of conduct, "My father and mother used always to say . . . ," and then follows some rule of the road of life, which from its very simplicity has been useful where more elaborate exhortations have been forgotten. As an instance of the persistent influence of such a precept—although in this case not very successful—I may cite a most estimable member of society, who would have been altogether delightful if his mother had not impressed on him in his youth that it was very rude ever to leave off talking. Whatever interesting general conversation was going on, therefore—and it is essential to be able on occasion to take part in general conversation as much by appreciative silence as by voluble participation—he never suffered silence to reign in his own little corner, but would continue during the most enthralling utterances of some distinguished talker to pour into the ear of his distracted neighbour the most tedious commonplaces



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on the weather and the Academy, feeling, in consequence of his early training, that even these were better than to say nothing. This was an error of judgment, no doubt, on the part of his mother: but to see the necessity of impressing such precepts on the mind of a child at all, is a step in the right direction. And the error of judgment simply shows the necessity of having them formulated with care and discretion. Those of us who were born many years ago, when methods of teaching were different (although, strange to say, the men and women turned out by them appear to have been much the same), will remember a strange series of doggerel rhymes destined to help us to remember the dates of English history. As I write I remember a rhymed statement that was for a long time suspended in air, so to speak, in my infant mind, with no direct connection with any individual. It was this :—

> In sixteen-hundred forty-nine
> The axe divided head from chine—

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which by the light of my later studies I suppose to refer to Charles I. There is something to be said for this method of instruction. It might be well, for instance, if our young people, apt to overlook in their daily and week-day haste the precept to "Order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters" were to be taught early in life to say every morning—

> When I arrive at forty-nine
> The place of honour shall be mine,

or words to that effect. This maxim might have some concrete bearing on existence, which the other one had not, and would presumably teach them before the age of mingled privilege and disadvantage is arrived at to leave the prescribed place to those more entitled to occupy it.

I once picked up from a bookseller's counter a little work calling itself "Etiquette for the Home," and as I opened it my eye fell on some directions to the wife when seeing her husband off for his work in the morn-

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ing. She was with one hand to give him his hat, with the other, being presumably of exceptional dexterity, to help him on with his coat, and, in default of a third hand with which to provide for further necessities, she was to "glance at his umbrella." I was at first so penetrated with the superficial absurdity of these admonitions that I did not realise the very sound teaching which inspired them, or the charm of the picture of the devoted helpmeet anxiously equipping her husband for the fray, and including even his umbrella in the circle of affectionate solicitude. We smile at this: but, translated into other phraseology, it would be a most excellent thing if into the hand of every wife were put a manual prescribing that she should smile rather than scowl at her husband when he leaves the house for his daily work. We want the principles, then, of, so to speak, a higher etiquette, which should help us to "translate the stubbornness of fortune into so quiet and so sweet a

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style" when it is merely the stubbornness of daily incident and not that of losing throne and patrimony that we have to bear up against. In China, we are told, it is stated in the classics that the laws and rules of ceremony are 300, and the rules of behaviour 3000. We in this country cannot I fear hope for a code so complete, although there is no doubt that we should most of us be the better for a few hundred suggestions on the subject. But without going even to that length, there is no reason why the laws of behaviour should not be as clearly stated as those of golf or cricket; and, presented in this systematic form, as easy to acquire. Most young people know in these days that a golf player must not strike his ball from the tee until the player in front of him is two strokes ahead. That rule, amongst others, is put up on every golf ground. But they do not know, since it is not put up in every drawing-room, that very much the same rule should be observed in conversation. A golf

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player would not think of standing quite close to the tee from which some one else is driving off, with his club raised to strike before the other has well played. But when he is playing the game of conversation, he thinks nothing of standing impatiently with his mouth open while the other player is speaking, obviously not listening, but waiting to speak himself the moment the other shall have done. He obeys the one rule because he has seen and heard it clearly stated as a rule of the game; he transgresses the other because he has not seen or heard it so stated.

These rules, therefore, should be drawn up and tabulated in a convenient form. The manual thus compiled should, when illustrated by examples and copious commentary, form a complete code of minor morals, and should serve as a handbook to the gentle art of human intercourse, holding a place between the manual of etiquette on one side, which deals only with immaterial and fleet-

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ing details of usage, and the teachings of a wider morality on the other, dealing with the laws and motives of conduct, and not with their outward manifestations. The ordinary manual of etiquette, as we know it at present — we probably all of us smile at the name—is not a very useful adjunct to demeanour, although it is quite conceivable that it might be more valuable if done upon slightly different lines, and with a little more subtlety of discrimination than usually accompanies it. We have yet to be given a book of the higher etiquette, if I may so call it, a book of precepts for everyday conduct done on simple lines, and giving us not only the general outline of what I may call our trivial duty to our neighbour, but also suggestions in detail, which would be most specially useful. We all know how sometimes some quite simple suggestion has enabled us to avoid a pitfall, to remove some stumbling-block of which we were unable to discover the cause. We know how

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maddening it is when a piano jingles or a machine sticks for some mysterious reason that we cannot discover, and how intensely grateful we are to the person who shows us where the difficulty lies, and enables us to remove it. Just as grateful should we be to the person who, when our manner jingles, so to speak, and causes our friends to avoid playing upon it, can, by proposing a simple expedient, put us on the right lines to remedy the defect. And here let me again plead that these suggestions should not ascend to too lofty an altitude. It is like being told that in order to secure health from a daily walk you must walk up to the top of the Jungfrau, when in reality no more is required of you than that you should walk from Chelsea to Portman Square.

Another obstacle to our progress is that we are constantly told that in this age courtesy is well-nigh impossible. We are confronted with the epoch of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers until we feel that if we

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want to be ordinarily polite we must wear powder, patches, a hoop or a sword, according to our sex. But is it not possible, even though our daughters ride on bicycles in a costume more daring than that of their mothers, that they should still speak pleasantly? because a boy does not call his father "sir," must he then give him the lie if he says it will rain? Surely not. *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint.* Don't, when you are teaching your children manners, try to put them back half a century at the same time, and make them feel that short of being a fossil or an anachronism they cannot be decently well-behaved; nor yet approach them on the highest level, and tell an unfortunate offender that unless he alters his whole nature, and gets him a new heart, he cannot hope to mend the error of his ways. This, if I may be forgiven for saying so, is a very needlessly heavy and discouraging line to take, for it is much more difficult to alter one's heart than one's manner.

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We will suppose, for instance, that you have become conscious of a disheartening fact that you fail to please your neighbour, and a deadly fear seizes you that it may be because you have bored him. If you should seek the best way to remedy this state of things, the advice you would be most likely to receive, either from yourself or other people, would be, probably, to the effect that in order to please others you should be unselfish and love your neighbour better than yourself; you should cultivate humility, generosity, charity, and many other virtues. But the result of this will probably be that the unfortunate offender, horribly discouraged at having so vast a field of moral achievement presented to him, and not knowing from which point to approach it, will content himself by endeavouring, as before, to comply in the general with all that the code of morals prescribes, while he continues in detail to annoy his fellow-creatures at every turn, for want of some simple rule of behaviour quite easy to carry out.

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For instance, we are told as a general maxim that we should sympathise with other people's joys and sorrows, and so ready are we to comply with this precept that we all fondly believe we carry it out. So probably we do, in intention. The mistake is that we do not always translate this intention sufficiently clearly into words. Indeed, we often convey an impression quite opposed to that of sympathetic benevolence. We should probably none of us acknowledge, or even conceive it to be possible, that we should not be sorry to hear of another person's suffering, whether mental or physical. And yet if an instance of it is brought before us in a concrete form, by the sufferer telling us of a bad night, a chronic complaint, or the misdoings of an unruly servant, what do we do? Do we seem sorry? do we concentrate our attention on the misfortunes of the narrator and pour consolation into his ear? Not at all. The moment his grievance has left his lips we instantly reply by a similar grievance

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of our own, for which we demand his sympathy instead of presenting him with ours. I think I am well within the mark in saying that on nineteen out of twenty occasions in which one human being says to another, "I woke at five this morning," or "I didn't close my eyes until dawn," the other one will reply, "And I woke at four," or "I didn't go to sleep till the sun was shining." Let the observer whose attention has been called to this topic notice the truth of what I have been saying — notice, for example, round a breakfast-table in a country house, how, if one person says he has been awakened by a thrush at 3 A.M., he will in one moment be in possession of the experience of the entire table, without one word from any one of comment or sympathy on the experience of others. Indeed, the interested observer will probably be conscious that he has to withhold himself by main force from contributing his own quota to the list. Let one of the simple rules to be obtained in our

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book, then, be never to say how you have slept yourself when your neighbour tells you what sort of a night he has had. Such a rule will be easily remembered, and the habit of complying with it easily acquired. It sounds trivial and absurd, no doubt: but I believe that to comply with a score of such maxims, judiciously chosen and constantly obeyed, would make more difference to each one of us than we are well ready to imagine, and would be of incalculable help in oiling the wheels of daily intercourse. We might even have a selection of the most essential hung up on our walls. I have seen something like this plan tried, indeed, in a public room destined to social gatherings in a provincial town, where there were actually printed placards hung round the walls, with peremptory admonitions addressed to those who were to be present. Thus: "Peoplestown Social"—("Social" has apparently in certain regions become a noun designating any gathering of people brought together for

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amusement and not for business)—"No stamping allowed." "No gentleman to dance more than twice with the same lady." "No gentleman to dance in a greatcoat." I have also seen in the same town—in a small eating-house this time—the following recommendations written in large round hand on a card conspicuously displayed: "Eat contentedly, pay cheerfully, leave promptly and make room for others." No more wise or comprehensive precepts could be put forth to those taking their places at the banquet of Life. Would not this excellent plan of impersonal advice by placards be capable of extension? Some good plain admonitions as to manners and behaviour hung up in London drawing-rooms might be of inestimable value. Pending the moment, however, when such a plan becomes general, let each of us formulate inwardly, at any rate, those warnings and admonitions most necessary to ourselves, and even if we do not hang them on our walls, endeavour

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to keep them always before our mental vision.

To make the machinery of life run smoothly is surely well worth doing, instead of daily throwing a handful of sand among the wheels; for it would be as easy to pick up again, one by one, actual grains of sand so thrown, and re-assemble them in one's hand, as to remove the effect of a hundred little crudities of manner and manners with which some people are wont to roughen the path of life for themselves and for others. These are the things which stand in the way of success—not only of "worldly" success and advancement, to use the conventional expression in its most grovelling sense, but of that other success, worldly too, perhaps, but in a higher sense, of making the best of the world while we live in it in regard to our relations with our kind. Let us realise that this lies a great deal more in our own hands than we are apt to think. Let us help one another to learn the way of achieving it. It means taking a good deal

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of trouble, no doubt; it means a good deal of deliberation and sustained effort, and, at the same time, it will depend a good deal more on the small things we do than on the big ones. This thought is not necessarily comforting: it is to many people rather the reverse. For in our hearts we most of us agree with the Eastern proverb, "One great deed is easier than a thousand small ones." But the great opportunity that we should doubtless so promptly and brilliantly embrace, does not come to us all; and instead of letting so much potential heroism run to waste, we had better employ it in the countless daily opportunities that we all have of winning by the veriest trifles, or of putting away from us, as the case may be, the goodwill of our fellow-creatures.

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# ON SOME DIFFICULTIES INCIDENTAL TO MIDDLE AGE



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# ON SOME DIFFICULTIES INCIDENTAL TO MIDDLE AGE

It is our misfortune, as we go onwards through life, engrossed mainly and pardonably enough by the present, that the successive phases of existence are apt to come upon us before we have quite realised how we are to bear ourselves in them. By the time we are beginning to learn they have nearly passed, it may be, and the picture of the immediate future presents itself in yet another focus, that surprises us afresh. The joins of life are apt to be awkward, unless the join is very skilfully made; and the one we are about to consider is perhaps the most difficult of all. It is a time that stands half-way between youth and age, giving a hand to each; with many of the drawbacks of both and all the advantages of



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neither. A time which is a strange and inconsistent medley of warring possibilities and impossibilities, still retaining some of the aptitudes and predilections of youth, without its glorious convictions of success, but tinged with a secret acceptance of defeat which yet falls short of the definite and dignified renunciation that accompanies old age. That secret acceptance of the inevitable, that inward renunciation of which the world need not know is a lesson that we all have to learn ; and like other lessons, if we do it in a hurry we shall acquire it but imperfectly. If we learn to renounce as we go on, with dignity and silence, our sufferings in so doing —if we are wise they will scarcely deserve the name—will not be magnified by being seen through other people's attempts at sympathy. Arrived at middle age, it is very possible that most of us will have been called upon to renounce a good deal : we started, probably, with the conviction that our heads would strike the stars, and we have become

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strangely reconciled to the fact that they do not reach the ceiling. But it was no doubt better to start with the loftier idea: a man should allow a good margin for shrinkage in his visions of the future. And it is curious, it is pathetic, with what ease we may accomplish the gradual descent to the lower level, on which we find ourselves at last going along, if in somewhat less heroic fashion than we anticipated, yet on the whole comfortably and happily. We have accepted a good deal: we have learnt how to carry our burdens in the way that is easiest. We are no longer storm-tossed: we know pretty much, arrived at this stage, what we are going to do,—those of us who thought they were going to do anything. The fact of taking life on a lower level of expectations makes it all the more likely that those expectations will be fulfilled. We have, with some easing of conscience, accepted certain characteristics and manifestations on our own part as inevitable, secretly and involuntarily cherishing a hope that where

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our peculiarities do not fit in with those of other people it may yet be possible that other people should alter theirs. We are, some of us, arrived at this stage, still in the relation of being younger, with reference to persons surviving of the generations who preceded us, and are perhaps beginning to understand a little, now that we have a grown-up generation following us, what the difficulties and trials of older people may have been in their relation to ourselves. We have a certain number of friends, a still larger number of acquaintances, of our own standing, of whom we observe with interest and note with some surprise that in many respects they do not remain as they were when we were all younger. Is this time, then, under these conditions, as happy as that which preceded it? Is it even, as some of the contented would have it, likely to be happier? If it is, then one drawback I fear it must have, that of approaching more nearly to the term of its happiness. At any rate the question, however often debated, has not

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much of a practical bearing; we are not called upon, fortunately, to choose at which stage of life we would prefer to be. We may therefore enjoy the peace that comes from the inevitable. But one thing is probably certain; that, on the whole, this stage of existence is pre-eminently important as a factor in our intercourse with our fellow-creatures. The government of the family life in the large majority of cases is mainly in the hands of the middle-aged; it is they who determine its general tone, spirit, and atmosphere. This is a heavy responsibility to bear, and those on whom it is laid can claim indulgence neither on the score of youth nor on that of age; they are old enough to perceive their mistakes, but not too old to correct them. It is they who create the atmosphere which surrounds their little community. And the atmosphere, figurative as well as actual, breathed by human beings during their passage from infancy to maturity, is of incalculable importance: it can save, or it may

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destroy. But as time goes on a gradual individual differentiation takes place: the bright dancing glow which shed a general radiance over everything fades away, and we are seen, each of us, as we are, as we have made ourselves during the passage of the years, surrounded by our own special atmosphere, unsoftened by the golden haze of youth on the one hand or by the silvery mists of age on the other. Middle age is seen in an unbecoming light. There is not much romance, much mystery about it: it is not often sung by the poets. Now it is that we must stand forth with such characteristics for good or evil as we have made our own by a never-ceasing, if unconscious, process of selection from successive possibilities. The range of those possibilities is apt to narrow curiously as time goes on, unless we are always on the watch. We lie in a constant danger of our interests extending abnormally in one or two directions, and dwindling in others, until, arrived at the moment when we are called

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upon to govern, when our minds and our judgment should by long exercise be more pliable than ever, more open, more ready to respond to any and every appeal to our sympathy or experience, we find on the contrary that we have gradually become absorbed from circumstances as well as from individual bias in a limited set of interests, sometimes indeed exclusively of a personal nature, and that our outlets and our inlets are in other directions closed. The question we have to ask and answer is, Need our characters deteriorate as our physical constitutions are bound to do, with the passage of time? Not if we are careful to keep a watch over the innate proclivities by which we are so mysteriously governed. This is not an idle query: it is one, on the contrary, which should be earnestly considered, and may be fruitfully discussed, since the answer to it lies in our own hands to a greater extent perhaps than we are inclined to believe at the first blush. We are apt to go astray

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from the fact that we generally discuss it in relation to the phenomena unpleasant to ourselves that we observe in other people. That is not so profitable. When we come to consider the question not merely academically, but as bearing upon our own daily action, we shall probably be inclined to admit that as time goes on we have a tendency to relax the watch over ourselves, and to yield more and more to the increasing indolence that comes with the years, to let our moral muscles become as stiff as the material muscles from the decrease in their use.

Most people arrived at the term of middle life of which we are speaking know that to keep themselves in what is called good condition as to their physical being depends almost entirely upon themselves, by a sage ordering of both the active and the quiescent scheme of life, by the requisite amount of activity as well as of self-denial. That it is possible in various unheroic ways to exercise this self-denial we may any of us deduce

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from the conversation of our older neighbours at dinner, who will, with unnecessary communicativeness, tell us what exact portion of the bill of fare is forbidden to them, and what are the threatened penalties that make them forego the enjoyment of what others are enjoying around them. If in this material form self-denial is possible, then the same men and women ought certainly to be able to achieve it in the moral order as well, given that they have the same conviction of the necessity of doing so. There does not seem to be any eternal reason why, since they are able so well to regulate some of their appetites, they should not be able to keep watch over their words, actions, and tendencies as well. Many a middle-aged man who uses dumb-bells regularly, or fences to keep his muscles in order, walks and rides for a given time every day to have the requisite amount of exercise, avoids overfatigue and unwholesome food, would no doubt, if he brought the same amount of

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purpose to bear on the moral side of his nature, have results just as profitable, and would find the will kept as pliable as the muscles. But the obstacle to achieving the latter is that it occurs to him to do one thing and that it does not occur to him to do the other. We are accustomed also to take for granted as a matter of course that we can keep the muscles of our intellectual faculties, so to speak, in good order by like means. We can keep our memory pliable by exercise. We can "keep up," according to the customary phrase, our knowledge of the various branches of learning we may formerly have acquired. But the side of us that matters incalculably the most, both as far as our own comfort is concerned and that of the companions of our daily life, that is, the necessity of keeping our moral system in good order, ready to respond to any demand upon it, this in some strange way we seem absolutely to disregard. We are apt to believe that, in flat contra-

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diction to the principles that we recognise as governing the rest of our being, our moral side will remain without any conscious effort of our own in that eminently desirable condition to which we are conscious (even if we do not categorically formulate that consciousness) of having by the mere lapse of years attained. But in this we are probably mistaken. It is likely that in the moral order as in every other there is no possibility of standing still. For, if we would keep ourselves up to the level of our best possibilities, impulse intention and effort require to be renewed day by day, by conscious and repeated endeavour, as surely as the wear and tear of our bodies requires to be repaired by fresh daily material, as surely as our bodily muscles require exercise if they are not to stiffen. But it is probable that in the majority of cases, unfortunately, that strenuous daily endeavour is wanting, and chiefly for the reason that, although we are more than ready to admit the necessity of arriving

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at a given result, we do not sufficiently consider the details by which we shall attain it. I say this with extreme diffidence. I am aware that most men and women in this country have been brought up according to the precepts of a very beautiful spiritual code, by which they in all good faith take for granted that their lives are governed; and I also know, and am glad to know it, that there are many whose daily actions are on broad lines governed by that code, in so far as it is possible to govern by it the lives of a time so absolutely removed from it by chronology, by racial temperament, point of view, and political conditions. But I have observed that even those whose constant thought is to live up to that spiritual code—I speak of them with reverent and genuine admiration—do not always seem able to carry out its broad general principles in detail. I have noticed, to cite but one instance, that such a one who would take for granted the desirability of loving his neighbour as

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himself, or of rejoicing with those who rejoice, can yet be maddened, and not conceal the fact, at having to endure on some quite unimportant occasion the manifestation of his neighbour's uncongenial hobby. I have seen that he is apt thus to estrange that neighbour's affection, making the latter as well as himself sin against the precept we have just quoted. It was St. Theresa, I believe, who said that by thinking of heaven for a quarter of an hour every day one might hope to deserve it. I should doubt if the majority of those who are enjoying a comfortable middle age deliberately spend that amount of time in thinking of their own moral condition. And yet it might no doubt be well and profitably spent by each of us in endeavouring to translate into the terms of daily life some of the stimulating and noble maxims we find in the code we have been speaking of, as well as in the writings of the great moralists of every time, and in considering how, by the light of

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them, we may make the best of our relation to that tiny corner of the universe which constitutes our surroundings. And here lies a seeming difficulty—a seeming one, I say, for from the moment we recognise it we are in the road to overcoming it—that the occasions in daily life in which our fallibility finds us out, the fruitful opportunities for friction that are most likely to come in our way, appear to us so ridiculously out of proportion to those great moral maxims that it seems almost absurd to bring the one to bear upon the other. This discrepancy is bound to be a handicap in the attainment of the perfect character, with respect to which the middle-aged are perhaps at a special disadvantage, not because they are naturally more wicked than the young, but simply because they have unhappily no one who is entitled to point out to them their shortcomings. This is a terrible disability under which they labour: that they are no longer in regard to any one *in statu pupillari*. This

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may not sound at the first blush perhaps an altogether unpleasant condition, but there is no doubt that the human being who is not criticised is not corrected; criticised, that is to say, to his face, and given the opportunity of comparing other people's view of what his conduct ought to be with what it actually is. As society is at present constituted, it is not the custom for one person to tell another, at the period when both may be supposed to have gone through one-half of their life with tolerable credit and dignity, wherein, nevertheless, that existence may have displayed shortcomings of which the offender was not perhaps aware. Such a comment, if gratuitously offered, would be offensive from contemporaries, intolerable from a younger generation, pardonable perhaps only from a generation yet older, from whom it would be accepted, however, with a kind of irritated indulgence, as being due to a general decay of perception. The only thing, therefore, to supplement this lack of expressed public



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opinion, is to exercise the most rigid self-criticism, if we would not have our peculiarities extend in every direction uncurbed. When I speak of the absence of criticism, I mean, of course, its absence as applied to the shortcomings of private life, not to those displayed in the light of day by persons who take part in public life, and who are bound to get a rough and ready (and on the whole tolerably just) all-round view of their character if they have the calmness to examine and disentangle and take the average of the evidence of friends and foes. It is not of these occasional helps to conduct that I am speaking. Nor have I left out entirely in my calculations the criticism incidental to daily family life, where, however, the wear and tear of circumstance, and the fact that such criticism is generally engendered in moments of collision, deprive it of some of its permanent value as an expression of deliberate opinion. But when all is said and done, it remains sadly evident that arrived at this

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stage of existence the only direction to which we may look for effectual help is within ourselves. It is no good blinking the fact that this makes our task more difficult. Compare the outlook, the condition of younger people, in this respect, the greater chances that are given them, the greater help they receive in working out their perfection, even if they do not always make the most of their advantages. We had those chances too, doubtless; we probably received as much help, and I have no doubt that in a more or less degree we profited by it. But were we told—many of us do not seem to remember it—that the struggle was to be a never-ending one? that when we left off being taught we should still have to learn? that from the moment we ceased struggling upwards we should insensibly begin sliding downwards again? That is what we need to realise, what we ought to make ourselves realise, at that moment when, our earlier impetuous onslaught on the interests of life over, we have

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leisure to look around us, and look within ourselves, by the light of the experience we have gained. Then it is that some of the breathless claims of existence being satisfied, we find that Conduct is the chief occupation that is left to us, and the most important of all. The young, on their first eager entrance into grown-up life, may well be forgiven if they do not sufficiently consider their words and actions, and watch the development of their own character and its effect upon other people; for they are, and they should be, much too busy perceiving, learning, expanding, choosing careers, love-making, wondering, yearning, distinguishing, to be able to concentrate their attention on mere Conduct. This state of things may no doubt have its drawbacks: but we will not dwell on them at this moment, for it is not the pitfalls incidental to youth that we are considering, but rather such as lie in the path of those older people, say between forty and fifty, for whom in the eyes of youth nothing is left but a

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dull quiescence, and such enjoyment of a senile kind as they may derive from looking on at the manifestations of the generation that is following them. But the problem, alas! is not so simple, as those same young people will find, when having in their turn, and almost without knowing it, made the inevitable step onwards, they find themselves still enjoying a good deal of vigour of mind and body, standing where their fathers stood but now. No, life at this stage is not entirely quiescent, not wholly retrospective, does not occupy itself exclusively with looking on at others, young and interesting though they may be: it would be easier to deal with if it did.

What, then, is our outlook, arrived at that moment that is called middle age? What is the prospect visible from that stretch of level country? This time, when we are young enough to remember, old enough to foresee, is the time, if ever, to pause and look. It is good so at intervals to take stock

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of existence, as it were; it is well to realise where we are and whither we are tending. That outlook, to be sure, is not the same in every case, and the factor that makes the great difference is whether we are looking at it from the point of view of another generation or exclusively from our own. The older people who are guiding others along the road feel in a measure actually responsible for its aspect; it no longer looks to them quite as it would if they were wandering along it with no one else to consider. We all know how the mere fact of displaying a place familiar to us, be it only a garden path ten feet long, to some one who is seeing it for the first time, imports into our view of it something that make us too see it over again under a new aspect. There is a received opinion that those who have young people round them remain younger themselves, they are kept more in touch with a young point of view, and even join more in youthful pursuits; and in some

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respects no doubt that is so. But it is well also to realise that the very fact of being surrounded with youth and its ardent pursuit of life, whether it be of ideals, of illusions, or only of pleasures, may make us feel incalculably older, for it accentuates and defines quite clearly a difference which in the absence of that point of comparison may be only vaguely suspected. I remember hearing a girl of twenty say to a mother of about twice that age—they had been speaking of some third person of would-be sprightliness—"I'm so glad you're not vivacious. It's not nice to be vivacious when you are old." Old! What a strange sound that word has to those who, until they heard it applied to themselves, were hardly conscious of being no longer young! And yet perhaps it is not a bad thing to realise that there are people round us for whom we are a living epitome of the life on which they are entering, for whose conception of old age—even though formed, as it may appear to us, somewhat

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prematurely—we are responsible: and who, seeing us in that light, take for granted on our part a certain seemly dignity, which they rightly consider one of the attributes of the venerable. To be sure, we none of us want to be venerable before our time: and it lies in our own power to remain young, in all save the number of our years. But let us do it wisely. Let it be the absurdities of youth we reject, while retaining its essential informing spirit. Youth can be manifested in other ways than by undue vivacity of demeanour—and we can keep it while we remain young in heart, in mind and point of view, in adaptability, in energy, in usefulness, and above all in Hope. That is the mainspring: the sense that there are still possibilities here below, whatever stage of existence we have arrived at. While there is Hope there is Life, is another and equally true form of the saying we have all clung to in our need. And the best thing that older people can do for younger, when these would

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fain look into the crystal ball of the future, is to show them in it the image of a life lived in its fulness, enjoyed and made the most of to the end: a life that remembers the past without regretting it, that knows how to enjoy the present, and that dares to look forward to the future. And of these times most of us will agree that the most important of all is the present. The future, however much we look forward, is bound to become the present before we have to deal with it, and it matters unspeakably to our happiness that it should be made the most of. This sounds a most obvious platitude, but it is something which is worth saying nevertheless.

I remember a most bitter disappointment of my early youth. We were going up, a large party, into some very high edifice, from which we were to obtain a peerless view. As we went up we kept catching glimpses of the surrounding country, and of the prospect which we knew was awaiting us, and we called one to the other, with cries of

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ecstatic surprise, to look as we went. But some of us made up our minds that we would not look at all on the way, but would wait until we got quite to the top, and could gaze all round from the highest point attainable and see the glorious sight in its entirety. But alas! what was the result? Arrived at the top, a mist had arisen, and that view, which we had not looked at while we could, was entirely hidden from us, and as far as we were concerned remained so for ever. This is not unlike what we are apt to do with our lives. Our minds, our hopes, are so fixed upon that which we shall see presently, the glorious surroundings that will be ours when we get to the top—the top, save the mark!! —that we have not the sense to look round us on the way, to make the most of every bright prospect we pass on the road, to know that it is not the future alone that must be contemplated, but that the present and its outlook must be jealously made the most of as well.

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It is curious how long that habit persists, of adjusting our existence mainly with reference to the future. We are insensibly thinking all the time what we shall do next, with the secret conviction that when we do it, it will probably set right any mistakes that we may have made or may be making. But it is what we *are* doing that matters more than what we *shall* do. And above all, still more than what we are doing, what we are being. It matters supremely at this stage what we are, both to ourselves and others. It matters to those of our own standing with whom we are brought into daily contact by the necessities of exacting mutual requirement; and, above all does it matter to those who are younger, for to them we must give something to imitate. This is another terrible weight of responsibility brought us by the years, that we are expected to be able, ready, willing to set the example of conduct, as well as explain its theory; that we are supposed by the mere lapse of time to be

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qualified to impart to the younger people about us a satisfactory moral training. Is there anything else in this world that we should venture to teach under the like conditions? Ask a man of fifty who was a scholar in his youth, but who has unhappily been hindered by circumstances from continuing his studies, to coach a boy for a scholarship, he will say with reason he is too rusty. Ask a woman who once played the piano brilliantly, but does so no longer, to perform at a concert, she will say her fingers are too stiff. Ask a noted pedestrian who is out of training to come with you for a mountain climb, he will reply that he is no longer in condition. But ask a man or a woman either, of the age in which, if only for the purpose of argument, I may be allowed to assume that the moral muscle has insensibly and unconsciously deteriorated, to direct a young ardent mind and heart entering upon life, ask them to coach the owner for the scholarships that are

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won through the teachings of experience, and then, indeed, there is no question of hanging back. We are all of us ready to shower instruction, albeit of a most desultory kind, upon those whom an accident of chronology has made our disciples. For this branch of tuition, the most important of all, there is no need, it would seem, to keep ourselves in training: we do not wait to consider whether by daily thought for the subject, by daily watchfulness of our own tendencies and our own deficiencies, our moral sense is still, so to speak, qualified to perform in public. Nobody raises *that* question. The position of guiding and exhorting others, the privilege of being looked up to, listened to, followed, which in youth can be acquired only by superiority of some kind, whether of merit, of endowments, or only of assurance, becomes ours with the efflux of time by prescriptive right; the mere number of our superimposed years can lift us to a sufficiently lofty emi-

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nence to speak from. Then it is that we are liable to fall into a great danger, that of propagating a moral code of a spasmodic and intermittent character, based mainly on considerations of our own idiosyncrasies, comfort, or convenience, on the regrettable discrepancies we find between our own point of view and that of the persons we are instructing. Our experience, instead of being a shield and a defence to others, becomes a weapon of attack against them. It behoves us to guard against this danger. It behoves us, since we are each of us, so to speak, going to occupy a Chair of Conduct, to keep ourselves in fit condition to do so, by consciously making a daily and persistent stand against the deteriorating effect of the conditions which surround us at this stage. I am not speaking of the particular form of deterioration liable to attend each different calling or phase of existence, although I should like to try to examine some of these

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in another place. For as surely as some forms of industry present special dangers, as surely as workers in lead or phosphorus are attacked by certain complaints that have to be specially guarded against, so certain is it that each form that our own particular existence takes has its own insidious danger to watch for and guard against. It is at this moment of the more general pitfalls incidental to middle age that I am speaking. One — we have already considered it—is the absence of sufficient and authoritative criticism, and as a complement to this, the likelihood of sinking more and more into a groove as time goes on, the probability that our own opinions will become more and more ineradicable, more unquestioningly accepted by ourselves every year that passes over our heads, every time indeed that we utter them to others, who are expected to listen to them with the appearance, at any rate, of acquiescence. Another difficulty is that finding that we have thus almost unawares slidden

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into the position of moral instructors, we cannot, as in other branches of learning, revert desperately for help and equipment to what we ourselves learnt in our youth. For if we do we shall obviously find that most of the maxims we then acquired, that now will spring most readily to the memory and to the lips, have been in most cases formulated by the older for the benefit of the young, and cannot always be used as a safe handrail and efficient guide by those who are not in the subordinate relation to others. Take, for example, that portion of the Catechism which recites "my duty towards my neighbour," and which inculcates submission, obedience, respect; being meant necessarily for those of the age when the Catechism is commonly learnt. But "my duty towards my neighbour," for the man and woman arrived at maturity, must, equally necessarily, take on another aspect. The maxims then followed should not, and cannot, be those prescribed in the Catechism, although

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they should be the counterpart of these, and render their execution possible. Since it is enjoined on the young that they should love, honour, and succour their parents, submit themselves to their governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters, order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters, it is evident that pastors, masters, parents, betters, should bear themselves in a way that may elicit and justify such love, honour, and respect. It is not easy, perhaps, to achieve this successfully. But the difficulty would certainly be lessened if we were quite clear that we wanted to achieve it, and had the necessity of doing so, the deliberate purpose, before our minds every day and at every turn.

But what of those who have not this incentive, who are not surrounded by a younger generation to whom they must serve as examples and guides? Are these more likely, or less likely, to make a success of middle age? They should in one way have greater



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facilities for doing so, for their attention can be concentrated on themselves instead of others. But on the other hand, having no constant claims on them from another generation, they may become unduly absorbed in themselves and the contemplation of their own advantages, or their own difficulties, or perhaps of both, to the exclusion of those of other people. The difficulties incidental to this time—I am speaking, of course, of average mortals, not of the exceptional of either sex who may have attained to marked distinction and achieved permanent success—are likely to press more hardly upon women than on men. Most men, in these days when the capacity of public service in one form or another appears to persist so long, glide on into the years without any very perceptible change of attitude. A man of fifty-five, say, is probably continuing with credit to himself the bread-winning or fame-winning calling which has been his since he arrived at manhood, and taking part in the active

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work of existence; and if he is in fairly good health is probably quite pleased with the world still, although life may have been for him a succession of compromises with Fate regarding what he had hoped, what he attempted, and what he has achieved. But even if the compromise has been a hard one, he may still bear himself bravely, provided he does not go about the world and complain of the way Destiny has dealt with him. But a woman? What of her, if she have not some special occupation which interests and absorbs her? The majority of her sex too often find themselves somewhat stranded in life at this time, when their children, if they had any, are independent and their ordinary occupations thereby lessened, their youthful pastimes are gone, and they are called upon, with less physical and mental energy than of yore, to put something else in the place of the occupations that are gone. What then? Or what of those who have not either married or had

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anything special to do, and now find their hold on desultory social intercourse lessened and themselves not indispensable to the community? Then it is that many women who have tried misguidedly to go through life without a hobby struggle desperately to create for themselves under these unfavourably altered conditions resources that they ought to have thought of years before. With belated feverish activity they try to fill up their lives with a variety of inadequate occupations, and are probably laughed at for their pains, instead of sympathised with, by more fortunate neighbours, whose lives a happy chance may generously have filled to the brim. But it is nothing to laugh at, that forlorn attempt at content—it is something to weep over, and, above all, it is something that calls for help. Here is a great possibility for those privileged ones to whom the accumulating years have brought accumulated happiness: it is to help along the road those who are lonelier, those who are apt to

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waste years still full of delightful possibilities, consumed by unavailing smouldering regrets, which they have not the courage to stamp out and turn their back upon—pitiful souls, swelling the melancholy band of those who cry out

"Senza speme vivemo in disio,"

of all conditions surely the most miserable. But I have not space enough here to enter upon all there would be to say if we began to discuss the destiny of the innumerable women who, arrived at this stage, allow themselves to be crushed under a weight of negative misfortune. Secretly mourning for the things they have lost, instead of steadfastly looking upon those they retain, they go through the world surrounded by darkness instead of by light, and no place is the brighter for their presence. And yet to try and increase the world's sum of joy and light-heartedness would, in default of another career, be no mean mission, no mean

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achievement: it might well as a last resource satisfy us as a substitute for the more dazzling exploits which we once meant to place to our credit. A modern philosopher has said that the possibilities of usefulness of every man or woman who has tried to be of use increase with each decade, as their sphere of influence becomes wider and their experience more helpful to themselves and others. This thought may well comfort those of us who have left our youth behind, for it is an earnest that life in some of its nobler aspects becomes more and more worth living as it goes on. To discuss, as many have done, if it be worth living at all seems to me a fruitless query: whether it be or not, it is the only way we know of spending the time. Let us make the best of it.

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# CONCERNING THE RELATION BETWEEN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

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# CONCERNING THE RELATION BETWEEN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

THE mothers who are to-day in the position of having grown-up daughters say "things were very different when we were girls;" they agree that there never has been a time in which the difference of "things" — presumably social ordinances, points of view, possibilities of independence, manners and customs, and the like, between one generation and another was so great. This may be so. At the same time the mothers have not had much opportunity of judging, for this is their only experience of seeing the change from one generation to another, since this is the only time in which they themselves have moved on from youth to middle age. "Why,



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look you!" cries the amazed and bewildered mother who, having turned a corner, sees stretching before her an entirely unknown and not very pleasant aspect of the road along which she is travelling. "Here is a point of view that no one else has ever beheld before!" But the truth is that every mother in each succeeding generation, arrived at that same stage, has always beheld it. But it is of no good her trying to make those who follow her see it too; it is ordained that to them it must remain invisible until, at the appointed time, they turn that same corner themselves.

The words which head this article embody one of the most arduous problems we are called upon to face. Some of us from luck, and others by good intention, succeed in solving it. Of these we need not speak, of those happy mothers and daughters whose intercourse has no history, to whom it has been given to understand all that that most blessed relation may mean of joy, of sympathy, of companionship. We are now considering

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those to whom that knowledge has not been vouchsafed, those who fail lamentably in solving the problem.

The onus of this failure, however, does not, I believe, lie upon the younger generation. When the problem is not satisfactorily dealt with, when the deposit of innumerable small mistakes on both sides has piled itself up until it has become consolidated into an almost insuperable barrier, I believe that the greater part of that deplorable result may be laid at the door of the parents, simply because they have generally been twice as long in the world as their children, and that they are therefore in full possession of a ripened judgment and experience at a time when those who follow them have not yet acquired much of either. The difficulty is generally recognised to be greater between parents and children of the same sex, from the obvious reason that people bound to go more or less along the same path must get in each other's way very much more than those who are not. And again this is

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much more likely to happen with mothers and daughters than with fathers and sons, from the fact that men go out into the world to make their livelihood, and are therefore not doomed to the friction of constant companionship. On the whole the mother has actually less opportunity of friction, in this country at any rate, with a son than with a daughter. The son is a great deal more away from home than his sisters, thanks to our plan of sending him from our surveillance during the most impressionable and plastic years of his life: he is treated, when at home for the holidays, as though he were a privileged being to whom the ordinary rules of behaviour do not apply. His peccadilloes are of a different kind from those of his sisters; he is judged by a different standard; the burthen of his mother's exasperation is carried by her on another shoulder, which relieves the strain. When the daughter does something which departs equally from the mother's habitual standard that departure cannot be justified by the fact that she is of a

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different, mysteriously interesting sex. It is often on quite minor points of difference from what the mother has been accustomed to take for granted that the foundation of the permanent divergence, the permanent ill-feeling, may be laid, which casts a secret shadow over so many homes—how many, is unfortunately not a subject that can be ascertained by statistics. The result, however, of observation generally is to make us feel that the instances are rare in which there is not a certain amount of what may be called affectionate friction.

I am speaking now of those mothers and daughters who have not to share with one another the pressure of want, whose possible privations may be of luxuries only—almost as souring, perhaps, to certain natures not nobly schooled. I am speaking of homes in which the women of the family have not each a separate compulsory bread-winning occupation, but have instead an equally compulsory proportion of inadequately filled

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leisure; homes of which the inmates have means to pursue any branch of frivolity or study that may appeal to them, and whose choice of occupation, therefore, determined not by necessity but by inclination, is at the mercy of caprice or of mistaken aptitudes. What are the chances that the family intercourse under these conditions will be entirely satisfactory? Let us assume, for the purpose of argument, that one out of every two homes makes a success of the situation, and then let us leave, as we have said before, these happy homes out of the question. Let us see whether any reason and any remedy can be found for the unsatisfactory relations between mothers and daughters which meet us at every turn. One of the great difficulties is that the sufferers are at first not conscious that they are facing any difficulty at all, not realising that perfect smoothness of family intercourse can be attained only by incessant watchfulness, by conscious, deliberate, and sustained

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effort. Most people who do not "get on," according to the phrase, with members of their family, seek the remedy (if they do seek one at all, and do not confine themselves to complaint) in an absolutely wrong direction, which is about as likely to cure the evil as if they tried to cure a broken leg with the remedies suitable for scarlet fever.

Our vision is obscured at the outset by the very words "mother and child," which suggests a picture to us of shielding, loving, incessant care on the one side, of youthful dependence and unbounded trust on the other. So it is, in most cases, while the child is young. The opening prospect is all of joy. When a young mother first has a child of her own it is too much to expect of her that she should be far-sighted enough to look ahead and see all the rocks she will find later in the path that looks so smooth. It is so easy to remain on good terms with a baby, and even with a child; so much easier than with a grown-up human being.

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Everything the child does is a wonderful achievement; it is athletic beyond the dreams of imagination when it can first stand on its feet, eloquent beyond experience when it first tries to speak. Then too often comes the inevitable, pathetic lowering of the diapason. As the years go on the mad joy in the child's doings, the absolute unqualified approval of them, changes first to misgiving, then to disapproval, then to a vain attempt to alter what is disapproved of, making it much worse in the process. The way to deal sanely with the question we are discussing is to look at it not solely and sentimentally in the aspect of mother and child, but in that of two human beings, each looking at life exclusively from her own point of view, and feeling an unconscious resentment towards the other for not seeing it in the same light. The daughter cannot reasonably be expected to see the mother's point of view, unless she is gifted with some extraordinary spirit of intuition and second

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sight; the mother ought to be more able to recognise the daughter's, but she is commonly too busy looking at her own. It is not at all a foregone conclusion that, as human nature is at present constituted, two average grown-up persons of the same sex will be able to achieve living under the same roof successfully after they arrive at the time when their lives respectively widen and become more individual, when they have different and specific necessities — even if they were not in the positions of authority and subordination respectively, long after the younger woman has arrived at the time when she justifiably feels she ought to be independent. When between two such people the grown-up and final developments of aptitude and occupation have been in the same direction, when they have sympathy of tastes added to the daily community of interest, unimpaired by unfavourable manifestations on one side or the other, then, and not otherwise, it may be possible for



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two members of the same family and the same sex to live together as the years go on, and derive from that prolonged companionship an ever-increasing, solidly-founded happiness. But saying this, I postulate a great deal. For two average women, properly equipped with an average share, and no more, of abnegation, of self-control, of tact, of kindness, of sympathy, are bound, if thrown together, constantly to find difficulties in the path. This is probably why the step-mother of fiction is always presented in a lurid light. It is taken for granted by the experience of ages that it is impossible for an older and a younger woman to live together in harmony unless helped by having the tie of so-called "natural" affection between them, that is, the tie of instinctive unreasoning sympathy that often, although not invariably, exists between blood relations. But that link is not nearly so strong as it is conventionally supposed to be, and the real mother, too blindly depending upon it,

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may find that it gives way suddenly at the critical moment.

It is a somewhat complicated question of ethics how long the daughter who does not marry must perforce continue to live at home. If she had gone away to be married, it would have been assumed that the mother could perfectly well have been left, that it would not have been essential to her needs or to her welfare that her daughter should be at her beck and call. Or again, if it had been necessary for pecuniary reasons, the daughter might have gone away and have had her own career and occupation, and made her own livelihood; and yet for some mysterious reason an instinctive feeling is found in nearly all of us that it would be downright wicked of the daughter, even if she is able to afford it, to go away and live under a separate roof somewhere else simply because she has a natural desire to live her own life in independence and out of tutelage; or, if it is not wicked, it is considered "odd" and a thing that would

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be talked about. But the misery of being talked about exists mainly in our imagination; it is not often, if ever, that we actually hear the things that are said of us; we only imagine them. Our imagination figures with great definiteness what would be said in the contingency of a daughter leaving her parents' roof to go away and live by herself. But we do not probably in our daily life worry ourselves by considering—and it is just as well we do not—whether people ever make comments upon the fact that the relations between that mother and daughter who have so unimpeachably remained together are commented upon by the people who have an opportunity of observing it, in terms of criticism that, extending over many years, swell to a more formidable bulk probably than the nine days' wonder that might be caused by the daughter's going away. And yet, assuming that the daughter were of independent means, it would, it seems to me, be incalculably better that she should, if she wishes it, lead an

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independent life. If everything is in the mother's hands, supposing her to be a widow so left that the daughter is dependent on her for an allowance, and therefore obliged to ask her assent to every step she wishes to take in life, the difficulties of the situation may be inconceivably multiplied.

The parent starts with a large fund of affection to draw upon, for the tendency of the child is instinctively and unreasoningly to love and depend upon the person who brings it up, to such an extent indeed that one sees sons and daughters, although placed under unfavourable conditions, in whom that attitude has unaccountably persisted through the years, in spite of many manifestations on the part of their parents that one would have expected to modify it.

It may be said that from two years old onwards every year lessens, by a very little it may be, but still lessens, the child's absolute and unquestioning confidence in what is told him by his elders. The imprint, I

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verily believe, can be indelibly made during that time only. But this is the moment when the average mother, however well-meaning, loving and anxious she may be, however careful about the wholesomeness of her child's food, the width of its boots and the becomingness of its hats, leaves it as to its moral equipment to receive in the nursery from untrained teachers a great number of rough and ready inadequate maxims of conduct, the observance of which is usually enforced by empirical methods, varying in stringency according to the nervous condition or temperament of the enforcer. The very best servants, although they may have the crude and clearly defined virtues of their class even to excess, such as honesty, cleanliness, faithfulness, and sobriety, are not necessarily the best educators; they may still be deficient in susceptibility to the finer shades of conduct.

Then follows the schoolroom phase. The mother, by her pre-occupation with the

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younger children, if for no other reason, is frequently incapacitated at this stage from keeping in touch with the studies of the older ones. It is now with the governess, not with the mother, that the child will have the most frequent opportunities of collision, and it is therefore with her that the discipline, the moulding of character, chiefly lies, the mother representing officially and inaccurately the supreme authority, if of an indulgent, intermittent kind. Then comes the crucial moment of all, when the girl, emerging from the hands of these trainers, is projected into the existence of her mother, who suddenly finds the care and responsibility of this full-fledged human being thrown entirely on herself, her own habits interfered with, her daily life complicated. The mother then takes counsel of her friends, and there are very few friends who have not got another intimate friend who keeps a school to which they have heard of somebody's daughter going. This obviously settles the question.

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More than once has a mother said to me: "It was such a great difficulty to know what to do with Barbara. So I have sent her to school. I am told Miss So-and-So has the most extraordinary knack of getting hold of girls." So the girl goes to school, and Miss So-and-So does get hold of her, probably greatly to the advantage both of the pupil's character and of her intelligence; but the fact remains that during the process it is not the girl's relations with her home, with her mother, that have been consolidated, but her relations with somebody else and with another home. I am not assuming that for a child to be with its mother is necessarily a liberal education; but since on the whole those of the same family are thrown more into each other's society than into that of other people, it is more convenient, more expedient, more seemly that the strong hold of affection and sympathy thus almost artificially induced, should be between those who have the tie of nature and association,

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whose interests are in common. But we will assume that the girl has remained at home, that no outward influences have, deliberately at any rate, been brought to bear upon her, and that the mother, although but dimly apprehending the immeasurable importance of the situation she is called upon to face, is now in sole charge of her child's mind and character. One initial difficulty is that the mother starts with a secret hope, not to say expectation, that her children will somehow be better equipped than most — better looking, better mannered, better natured, better witted. On this assumption she anxiously, nervously deals with the situation all day long, incessantly pointing out what she considers her daughter's lapses from the right path. But, misled by the lofty expectations we have described, ordinary human lapses appear to her terrific. In her efforts to direct aright the flood of information suddenly demanded from her she is led to impart more than is absolutely prescribed by

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duty. She feels at every moment the obligation to "improve" the occasion, as it is called, an entirely misleading expression, for it very often spoils the occasion altogether; especially as her criticisms are apt to be based not only on the Just Man's eternal principles of conduct, but on her own personal prejudices and idiosyncrasies. She rebukes her daughters with as much irritation and severity for pronouncing a word differently from herself, or wearing a different kind of underclothing, or doing their hair in a way she considers unbecoming, as though they were infringing one of the ordinances of the moral code. And it is not, generally speaking, heroic misdeeds on the part of the daughter that call for admonition; it is not always that she wishes to become a missionary, or to go on to the stage, or to marry an adventurer. It is mostly by a thousand minor departures from the demeanour, opinions, and conduct which the people she lives with would consider desirable that she offends; and it is unhappily her

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mother who is *ex officio* the daily and hourly critic of such offences. It is not at all an uncommon thing for a girl at the impressionable, enthusiastic, absurd stage of her entrance into grown-up life to take a violent admiration for some woman older than herself, in whom she is ready to confide, to whom she turns for guidance, from whom she will accept suggestions that would make no impression if they were part of what she considers the inevitable home criticism. And it is natural that it should be so. There is nothing in the mere juxtaposition of youth and middle age to make the relation an unpleasant one. What the girl objects to is not the contact with a wider experience, with another phase of life. On the contrary, these are essentially interesting to her; but from her mother she apparently cannot get them without an admixture of reproof and correction added to the communication of experience. We all know that it is easier on occasion to pour out our souls, to make some special con-

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fidence, to one who will then pass out of our ken, and will not from circumstances have incessant opportunities of interpreting the daily round of our actions by that moment of self-revelation. "In the breast of all of us," says Stevenson, "a poet has died young." Sometimes he dies hard, killed by others. The seething inward ferment of the girl, at the moment that she finds herself on a level, as she conceives it, of standing, outlook, comprehension, with those who have achieved what she—of course—means to achieve, is a phase that should be tenderly, wisely, sympathetically dealt with by those who can influence her. It is at this phase that many mothers, if they overhear fragments of their daughter's conversation with a companion of her own standing of either sex, will probably become aware that although in daily life she appears a hearty young person enough, her soul is in reality oppressed by the gloomiest doubts as to whether life is worth living. She is representing herself as morbid, lurid;

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her life is clouded; her heart is barren. But the way to correct these distressing manifestations is not to say, "Jane, how absurd!" nor need they make the parent anxious. It is astonishing how compatible they are with a keen, healthy enjoyment of life and pleasure.

It requires a great deal of deliberate thought and sense on the part of the mother to play the confidante adequately; in fact, I believe that the best way is to remain the onlooker, and learn enough by the intuition of close and daily companionship not to need any more explicit information about ephemeral contingencies. Let one girl tell another the enthralling news of words and looks; it is not dignified that the mother should sanction it; it is not always necessary that she should disapprove of it. Confidences of another kind respecting aspirations, points of view, ambitions, self-appreciation, self-consciousness, are more difficult, generally speaking, for the reasons given earlier, for the girl to make to one by the side of whom she lives; but

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happy is the mother to whom they are freely given, happier still the one who is wise enough to deal with them in the right way.

It is an open question, and one of the most interesting, how far it is advantageous to put the point of view of a more advanced time of life before those who are younger. I am not now speaking of the intimate underlying personal view of the flight of time, whether it be resentment or resignation. That is a grievance which the most sympathetic and understanding of young creatures cannot appreciate, cannot receive in any other way but with impatient inward criticism. I am speaking of the general change of focus, the readjustment of expectation that must inevitably accompany the passage of the years. Is it not better to leave each one to find that out for himself? There are many axioms, as a great French writer has said, which we go on hearing half our lives without understanding them, until one day they are illumined by something that happens

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in our own experience, and we suddenly realise what they mean. Is it good for the young to have their minds prematurely filled with such axioms, filled with undigested philosophy of existence prematurely imparted? One is apt to crystallise one's opinion of an idea, of a principle—as of a person or a place—by one's impression on first coming into contact with it; and the question is whether the idea, clear in later life and better assimilated, does not forego some of its possible advantages by presenting itself to the younger mind when it cannot appear in its right focus. This, it seems to me, also bears cogently upon the question of the selection of reading for younger people. I am not—I speak as one behind the age — an advocate for indiscriminate reading. We are no longer in the days when Mary Lamb was "tumbled early into a spacious closet of good old English reading, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage." These words were written when the novel of daily life

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was only just beginning to make its way. The mass of second-rate literature that overflows from the closets of to-day is far from being a fair and wholesome pasturage. And even were it less noxious than it is, I cannot think it an advantage, for the reasons above stated, for the child or the young girl to anticipate experience by reading and pondering over accounts of a phase of life she has not yet reached, of which the descriptions are readjusted by nothing in her own experience and must necessarily come to her in some inflated and unnatural proportion. Let this point of view be explained to her, instead of angrily forbidding the undesirable book, and she will probably accept it. There are young people of precociously developed minds and temperament from whom it is difficult to keep the problems that should come later, and that coming naturally at their own time are unobjectionable. We require to distinguish between that which is simply a somewhat undesirable anticipation of ex-

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perience, and that which is essentially undesirable at any time; and the former should not, as too often happens, be treated as a crime.

We may come, I think, to the conclusion, on the whole, that in most cases (I cannot repeat too often that I am leaving out of the discussion the many cases in which the relation between mother and daughter is the mainspring of life's happiness to both) the relations between the two people we have been describing,—an average and well-intentioned mother with a normal daughter, both brought daily face to face with commonplace difficulties that they try, in a haphazard way, to overcome,—are neither all they should be, nor all they should not be. Life is quite possible, although not always agreeable; and if, as time goes on, the daughter marries and goes away before the latent antagonism in the situation has had time to reach an acute stage, all may still be well. They no longer feel the discomfort of having to keep in step, since they are no longer linked



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together. But if the girl does not marry? Then we have to consider a graver aspect of the question—the antagonism between the two natures, who would have done excellently apart with occasional meetings, under conditions in which certain evil possibilities would have remained for ever dormant, arrives now at a point at which it poisons the whole existence. On which side does the fault lie? I am inclined to think that—not as to the initial antagonism, but as to the way of dealing with it—it lies with the mother.

As to the original differences of nature which prevent a harmonious understanding, it is no more possible to say who is in fault than it was possible in our childhood to say which of two pieces that would not fit together in a puzzle map was at fault. In some cases, I have known in my own experience of three and have been told of others, this growing antagonism finally reaches the proportions of the most extraordinary antipathy between the mother and the daughter. It is not merely

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not "getting on," it is an absolute furious enmity on the part of the mother. I have heard stories which would be quite incredible if they were not based on incontrovertible evidence. I know of a mother, a woman of position and means, who, after banishing her daughter to the back regions of the house, inflicting all kinds of menial work upon her, refusing to give her any of the opportunities of her age, any means or any diversion, afterwards relapsed into exactly the same attitude towards a younger girl who, when a child, had been indulged and petted. The situation happily does not often become as bad as this, but the cases are many where these possibilities exist in embryo, and in which the eldest daughter especially has her whole life darkened by her relations with her mother, a shadow which seems darker when she sees the light and warmth shed on the path of her younger sisters. If we try to get to the bottom of this question, we shall probably come reluctantly to the conclusion that if the actors

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in the drama are devoid of the finer, nobler instincts, these results more or less marked are the inevitable outcome of the conditions. There is more than one reason why the brunt of the difficulty should fall upon the eldest daughter more than upon the younger ones. The average mother who has married, say, in her early twenties, is when her first children grow up and are at what is called the "difficult age," at a still more difficult moment in her own life. It has dawned on her that she has left her youth behind her, although, until her children grew up, she thought she was still young; she is entering upon that phase which is aptly called the youth of old age; she has embarked upon that time of transition through middle age which is to some women fraught with bitterness and resentment. These are very crude expressions: but it is well perhaps when we are safe-guarded by the fact that we are considering a problem in the general and not in the personal, to try to look it absolutely in the face, to speak the truth about it, and to

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use the words which really describe it. There are happily many many mothers to whom the growing up of their daughters brings ever fresh possibilities of loving sunlit intercourse, but it is not these whom we are considering here, although the thought of them may well serve us as a consolation and an example. The less fortunate woman we have been contemplating, realising that her youth is behind her, looks round her with a despairing glance, and almost unconsciously vents that despair upon the person in the foreground of her life who is her constant companion in a subordinate position, and who, worse than all, is daily giving unconscious testimony that she is just entering into possession of all that the other has left behind. She is unhappily the person directed by Destiny to make that truth clear. In the merest details of daily life she may constantly be an obstacle in the mother's path. At this time the mother, if she had any mild hobby, any special occupation (I am leaving out of the question those who have the saving

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grace, the absorbing interest of an occupation, above all an art, pursued with success) if she has the sort of every-day wisdom that many women of the world not very specially endowed still possess, endeavours to go on with it. She reads, perhaps, she learns languages, she plays the piano, she goes to a studio. She knows pretty well by this time what she is going to make of any of these things, although she may not have cared to define it clearly to herself; but they serve to fill up time. She still feels her own clothes are important, she still looks in the glass, people still call upon her whom she wishes to please. Then comes the young and eager creature ready to embark upon any or all of these occupations with a fever of excitement, it may be; full of enthusiasm, full of hope, of ambition, believing in the glorious result. She accepts as a matter of course that her mother is still cultivating them mildly, after the fashion, she possibly thinks, of parents, whose attainments, learning, and achievements, compared to those of a later

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day, are naturally inadequate; she herself is the person for whom attainments matter. Her own chosen occupations are much more important than anything that her mother wants her to do: her clothes, her appearance, her pleasures must come first. The mother, who had been walking along a smooth path, is now constantly confronted by small obstacles. The spectator looking on at an unfortunate relation of this sort between a mother and daughter is apt to formulate it very crudely, and say that the mother is jealous of the daughter. Perhaps that is the real name of it, and yet it suggests something to which too definite and special a meaning has been given. What is to be done then to remedy this miserable state of things? The misfortune is that the terms of the contract drawn up by nature are so terribly vague. The mother interprets them to mean that the daughter's existence is to be absolutely subordinate to her own, that the daughter must be always available for

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her mother's service: the daughter when she resents that interpretation is told by the mother that she is selfish. Unselfishness, however, is a difficult quality to teach. It is extremely difficult for the mentor not unconsciously to slide into the position from which she is endeavouring to remove the other person, and to become selfish herself. This is one of the hardest problems the bringer-up has to face, and it is probably best solved, not by evading it, but by facing it completely, by boldly taking up the position of having the prior claim for consideration and indulgence of proclivities and assuming that, on occasions when that claim is insisted on, younger people should at once admit it. On the grounds of practical expediency this is probably a tolerably good working basis. "An two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind," says the proverb, and it is less misleading than such analogies generally are. But the person who rides in front should be wise and careful, and, above

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all, should know what are the stumbling-blocks to be avoided; exercising unceasing watchfulness, unceasing self-control, wisdom in foreseeing difficulties, tact in dealing with them when they arise.

In this way the mother—and it is her best hope—may lay a foundation of affection, of trust and confidence so strong that it can withstand the successive strain of the years. No temporary remedies, no dealing rightly with isolated difficulties are of much good: the essential thing is to make the link between the mother and her children so solid that when the moment of tension comes it will not break.

Young people go through life by the side of an older one like a young dog taken out for a walk. They are always running across the path sideways, darting into a hedge and into a ditch, stopping to wonder, rushing along the road, rushing back again.

It would be as useless, indeed as ineffective, to insist upon accompanying them into every

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detail of companionship as it would be to dart in and out of the hedges with one's terrier. The important thing is that one should be walking along the middle of the road all the way, ready whenever one's young companion comes back again. The sense of permanent and enduring companionship is not given necessarily by sharing the identical pursuit, by reading the very letter written or received from the friend; but it is given by sympathising with the pleasure given by the pursuit, by tolerating the mention and the frequentation of the friend, by abstaining from criticism, and above all from derision, of the pursuit, the friend, the occupation that does not appeal to oneself, if that be the only ground on which they are objectionable.

It is useless for us, the mothers of to-day, to take as a standard for the conduct of our daughters that which we in a past generation were required to do by our mothers. The daughters of that time did not go alone

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in hansoms, the well-to-do never travelled in third-class carriages or in omnibuses, there were no bicycles, there were petticoats, there were chaperons. We must not object to let our daughters go out in the street alone because we used not to do so, nor hope that they will return to us between each dance at a ball as we returned to our mothers when we were young. But let us remember that with those mothers of ours, the grandmothers of to-day, the crucial question had been as to whether they should be allowed to waltz at all, or still worse dance the polka. But the grandmother ended by dancing the waltz, and the mother the polka, and the daughter dances the kitchen—not to say the scullery—lancers, and everything else she can find, and she will continue to dance gaily along the road until she finds her own daughter catching her up with some new mode of locomotion she has never dreamt of before. And so the world goes round. We think we know that it goes round; but we act as

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though we knew it stood still and as though we were as firmly of that opinion as were any of the persecutors of Galileo.

A great many of us in these days are concerned about the condition of Society, in its widest sense; we discuss the national life, the social fabric, its deficiencies, the way to remedy them. We discuss what we shall do with our girls and boys; what the condition of women is, what they can do to make the world better. There is one thing at any rate of incalculable importance, which lies mainly in their hands, that women can bring about; it is that the generation which is growing up should be wisely and carefully steered, that it should be sent out into the world happy and warm, with a glowing belief in joy, in love, in gaiety, as well as in the nobler possibilities of the years to come; taking for granted a daily and understanding sympathy in the home, a constant grace of intercourse, a wise and courteous forbearance displayed by timely silence and

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kindly speech, an affection that gives a constant reassurance in the smaller as well as in the daily crises of life.

The family is the epitome of the community; and the influence of its wise governance and harmonious relations is bound to extend beyond the four walls of the home.

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# SI JEUNESSE VOULAIT

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# SI JEUNESSE VOULAIT

I SHOULD like to think that this paper will be read by those to whom it is addressed. This is however but a forlorn hope, for young people as a rule, I fear, are not much given to reading articles on the conduct of life, particularly of the kind which might more fitly be called, in the elegant newspaper language of the day, Sermonettes. However, with this warning, and on the chance that some may after all read them, I should like to say quite explicitly at the outset that my words are addressed to average and not exceptional young men and women; and to such, moreover, who are exposed by the conditions of their life to the perils of too abundant leisure, and less likely therefore to fill up time to their advantage than those who



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have the safeguard of constant compulsory employment.

"Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait!" says the proverb—but, like all proverbs, it only fills about half the ground it attempts to cover. It is an outline sketch which resembles life about as much as does a child's primitive drawing of two arms, two legs, and a body, which passes well enough as a conventional representation of Man, but would hardly be adequate if we wished to learn anatomy from it. It would be simpler, no doubt, if that outline drawing given by the proverb were accurate, and if we had only to put on the one side ignorant energetic youth, and on the other all-wise and decrepit age. But the limning of our lives is a great deal more complicated than that; and we have to fill in the outline sketch for ourselves, with a great deal of care, a great deal of thought, and an unceasing and unremitting effort if, when the moment of old age is arrived at, the whole is to present a pleasing

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picture. It is not only "si jeunesse savait"; it is "si jeunesse voulait," "si jeunesse croyait," all the things that lie in the hands of youth.

It is while life is fluid that it is comparatively easy to pour it into one shape or another. When it has stiffened into one particular form, and that one perhaps not the most desirable, it is more difficult to alter it. Therefore is it important for men and women both, when they have arrived at the stage known as "grown-up," to see that their life is likely to flow along in the best channel. This is the moment when, if circumstances and surroundings have been propitious, the young should be ready to grasp life with both hands, to enjoy its opportunities of light-hearted unreasoning enjoyment while beginning to guess at its graver responsibilities. Now is the time to be wise as well as foolish —the wisdom of youth may sometimes consist in being both — the time to talk sense as well as nonsense, to want to move for

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the sheer pleasure of motion, of mind on occasion as well as of body; the time to have endless discussions on life and its problems and possibilities, to make the friendships—but of these more hereafter—that will be potent factors in our lives; the time to have existence and its incidents revolving round one particular person after another, sometimes the wrong person, sometimes the right.

There is not, and most happily, a definite halting place in which we may say to ourselves, "Now I will say good-bye to light-hearted youth, I will turn down this road and begin to be old." No; twenty joins hands with twenty-five, twenty-five with thirty, thirty with thirty-five, and so ever onwards, until the deposit of years gradually, without our seeing at which moment, hides our youth from us, as in Wagner's opera the figure of Freya the Youthful is at last hidden by the piled up treasure of the Nibelung. They who look forward into the future and begin

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in time to construct it may remain young in mind, in heart, and in purpose.

Bourget has defined the difference between riches and poverty to be that the "remediable margin" is so much greater in the former. And this holds good of the riches also of the soul. This is the immense, incalculable advantage of youth, to be rich in time, in possibility, in opportunity: it is then that we may look out with hope on the wideness of the Remediable. For it is in youth that each fresh discovery regarding life may be responded to by the instant thrill of possible endeavour: in youth that we contemplate that stretch of land, the field of our actions, as we are entering the harbour and not as we are leaving it.

We have lived in a time in which we have had to call upon the young to fight for us and for our country, and splendidly have they responded. But what about other trumpet-calls, heard for so long that the sound has become dulled by custom, calls to duty

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less conspicuously heroic, to be accomplished by those who stay behind? The heroism of these less fortunate ones must be exercised, if at all, on a less glorious field; their endurance of hardship — should they wish to endure — must take the less palatable form of fulfilling in daily self-denying effort the less romantic though no less important duties of the son, the brother, the friend, the citizen —of being content to walk with a firm step in the rank and file of life if need be, and excel there in default of a nobler place. It has happily become a commonplace to us by this time that our young officers, when at the front, have known how to accept with uncomplaining cheerfulness every suffering and privation that has fallen to their lot, and we admire them for it from our hearts. But would it not be still more admirable if the robust and splendid self-denial that they all can display on occasion were exercised not only in periods of stress and excitement; and if on their return to their usual surround-

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ings many of them did not take it for granted that they have earned the right to relapse into a state of unquestioning self-indulgence? The tendency to self-indulgence in either sex and at any age is no doubt one of the characteristics of our time; it is part of the Spirit of the Age, that comfortable generalisation that so consolingly puts the blame on to everybody at once, instead of distributing it among individuals. But it is surprising with what ease that encroaching spirit can in reality be put to rout by any individual who chooses to stand up to it, instead of lying flat before it.

Young people would feel themselves shamed if they allowed, without any offer of help, one who was older to walk beside them carrying a heavy burthen; but they allow the burthen of life to rest on those who are older, not only without protest, but with a very definite reluctance to shoulder it themselves unless they are compelled. What is being Young? Is it by some great and deserved privilege

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to have become entitled, by coming into the world a certain number of years later than somebody else, to have precedence, to know better, to be more worthy? But what then about the subsequent people who are going to be born still later?—are they also going to be superior to those formerly young, but now their elders? In that case why does not the world get better and better as it goes on? Why are human beings pretty much as they were a hundred, five hundred, a thousand years ago? At the exhibition of 1900 there was to be seen in Paris an interesting mechanical phenomenon which might well have passed for an allegory of existence. It was a moving road which went round and round, an immense circuit from which every side of Paris could successively be seen, and which carried along on its surface floods of human beings, who all therefore, during the circuit, gazed upon the same spectacle one after another, whether or not they began or quitted the moving road at

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the same place. Some younger in travelling than those in front of them might pass the Eiffel Tower ten minutes later than others. Were they for that reason more skilful, more gifted, more highly privileged, and, above all, were they better able to judge of each successive spectacle that met their gaze than those who had begun earlier? I should doubt it. They were probably less able to judge, as they had seen less to compare it with. Each one of us who joins this eternal moving road of life comes in time to the same place as the others who precede us on it, and those who follow come to the same place too. Let us therefore lay aside the strange delusion that possesses so many of us at the start, that we, and only we, shall presently come to some place to which no one has ever been before. Every one else, in reality, will have been there too; though every one, no doubt,—and here is our individual opportunity,—does not learn an equal amount from the various phases of the

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journey. The great point is to understand as truly as we can the meaning and value of all that we successively encounter.

From the point of view of understanding, of mere quickness of apprehension, the mind between twenty and twenty-five is presumably just as good, to say the least of it, as the one of ten or fifteen years later; what is not so good is that it cannot have so definite a sense of proportion with regard to the importance of the incidents it meets on the way. That is the knowledge of a later period. Everything met for the first time is surprising; and therefore it is that older people are more likely to "know better," according to the occasionally offensive formula, as far as the lore of life is concerned, mainly because they have had the opportunity of learning so many lessons in it. The young are no doubt in possession of the rules of life's arithmetic; but the mastery of those rules gained by working many sums comes only with time. The sum should be worked early,

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nevertheless, and with application, that the right way of attacking the problems may be acquired in youth, when mental and moral habits are being determined, and the impulse of the mind and will is fresh and strong. It is in youth that all human beings must determine for themselves on broad lines the path which they shall tread, although the variations of circumstance may determine it in detail in this or that direction. Take in your hand, then, at the beginning of life, certain fine and noble maxims which shall not be put away on a shelf as too precious to be brought out every day, but of which the daily contemplation and practice shall make a part of your nature, a part of your instinct, shall fill your outlook on life with lofty standards and possibilities. I am aware, of course, that there are many, many men and women, young as well as old, in whose life certain spiritual exercises, which should if consistently acted on keep them on the higher spiritual levels, form a daily part.

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But there are also many others whose aspirations and beliefs take a less definite form, and who therefore are apt, for want of daily or weekly prompting from outside, not so often to formulate in words certain precepts on which, if unconsciously, their general code of conduct is based. And yet the mere putting into words of such maxims is a help and a suggestion: the very limitation effected by defining our possibilities in speech seems to bring them more within our grasp, to make us see the path more clearly, to prevent us from stumbling along it haphazard, at the mercy of chance, impulse, and opportunity; just as you would find your way with more speedy and unerring certainty from a signpost on which a few plain words were written, than if you vaguely tried to shape your course by the stars, or the planets, or any big eternal principles too tremendous to bring into play at every street corner.

It is good to have a daily breathing space,

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at any rate, in the purer air of Intention. This is no novel suggestion—woe to us indeed if it were not a commonplace!—and I make it therefore diffidently. But it bears repeating many times. Realise at the outset of your responsible life, and realise afresh every day, that there are some things you will consent to do, and others that you will not; some things to which you will never stoop, others that you will determine to attain. And the mere fact of clearly formulating these decisions to yourself is a step towards carrying them out.

Give a place in your daily litany to the aspiration to be delivered from all ignoble ambitions; from all dishonesty, pose, and pretence. Do not let your standards of conduct and intercourse become blurred. It is astonishing how soon, even with the fastidious, the frequentation of those governed by a lower standard tends to deteriorate one's own. The trite story, which, however, is of such far-reaching significance that it may well be

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repeated, of a crowd which, looking on at the execution of a gang of criminals, turned away with a shudder of horror from the first head held up, gazed calmly upon the second, and derided the executioner when he let slip the third, holds good, in less ghastly contingencies, on many an occasion in daily life. The manifestation which gives us an unpleasant jar the first time (the exact and literal word "shock" has become so overlaid with convention and absurdity that I hesitate to employ it) is soon accepted as part of the personality of the offender. It ceases to give a jar, it is then tolerated, and finally imitated. The tolerance is not invariably a virtue. Tolerance of an honest opinion different from our own is one thing; tolerance of a deliberate lowering of the standards that we have proposed to ourselves is another. Keep a fine edge on your susceptibilities that you may not come to tolerate the inadmissible, and to this end, "frequent the best company," as Thackeray has said, "in books as in life," in

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both of which the best companions are those who send you spinning forward with the sense that everything worth doing is more possible, that life lies open before you with great wide spaces in which to go forth. Choose the friend who will stimulate you, to whom you will look up instead of looking down, the friend with a large mind and quick perceptions, who is strong enough to seize life with a firm hold, and whose example and companionship shall cheer you on to the same. For that is one of the essentials of the spirit of youth; to live, live and not stagnate. I would rather see young creatures, whether men or women, go forward headlong and fall into one mistake after another, if they are made of the stuff that will learn from these mistakes to walk without falling, than see them creep self-indulgently along too slowly to stumble, with no hold worth having on existence in their nerveless uncertain grasp.

Science tells us that no one body approaches another in space without both being deflected

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more or less from their original course, the more powerful acting more strongly on the other. So it is in life. Every one of us acts either for good or for evil on every other human being to whom we approach near enough. It is all important, therefore, at that time of life when youthful friendships are formed with ardour and eagerness, that those we admit into our proximity should be likely to influence our course in the right direction. I am considering for the purposes of argument friendships between people of the same sex. Stimulating, valuable, interesting companionship is, of course, possible between different sexes, not to speak here of one special relationship into which that companionship is apt to drift, which also has many merits. But, putting that special companionship aside, although men can compare notes with women on the exploration of life or books with added zest from the difference of point of view, yet it is precisely because the conditions are so entirely and eternally

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different, that in many ways—I speak prosaically no doubt—more direct help is to be gained from one of the same sex looking out on to life from under exactly the same conditions.

What are the chief essentials in a friend then? assuming of course as a foundation the indispensable sympathy which causes the friendship to exist at all. Our friend must be honest, must be intelligent, must be articulate, must be discreet. Honest, morally and intellectually, that intercourse may rest on a solid basis, and not on the shifting sand of pretence; intelligent, that his opinions may be worth having; articulate, that he may be able to put them before you to your profit; discreet, that your own self-revelations may be safe in his keeping. That absolute honesty of the intelligence which never pretends to think or to know something that is not really thought or known, is, in my opinion, the first essential in a friend. It is of course a quite elementary departure from the path of virtue,



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and one which the more experienced learn to avoid with the years, to say that you have read a book, seen a picture, heard a piece of music that you only know by repute. I once heard of a girl—she was intelligent, but apparently not quite intelligent enough—who boasted with evident satisfaction that she had discussed during a whole dinner-party two books that she had not read. I must confess I fail to see how that process can have benefited any one. It is of course possible to be immensely interested in discussing a book with even very young men or women, provided they have read it, have been really interested in it, and know enough of the subject to make their criticism and standards of comparison of possible value. Every one who is a genuine human document, at whose ideas you really get, such as they are, whether adequate or not, is bound to be in some degree interesting. But as a rule those people are not interesting, except as a warning, who have constructed to themselves some kind of

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an idea of what they think human beings should most effectively think and feel, and who enunciate deliberately-made opinions in accordance with it. This method, if merely from the point of view of expediency and feasibility, to put it on no higher ground, is a great mistake : it increases the complications of existence a hundred-fold. It is already sufficiently difficult, and very often unpleasant, to be one's self ; it is extremely difficult consistently to be some one else. I once sat at a dinner by young man of twenty-two, who after enunciating at second-hand, of course, with a bright boyish smile on his face, what he considered were the laws of "getting on" in the world, in which manœuvring and titled influence played a large part, added, with an air of ineffable complacency, "I am afraid you will think me a terrible cynic." "Cynic?" I should like to have replied. "Heaven forfend! I think you somewhat of a goose, perhaps, for generalising and mostly on hearsay from some unfortunate instances

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that you must go through the world like a conspirator in a cloak. Drop that cloak and that slouching hat, and you will see much more clearly. Try to look upon things as they are, and not as they sound most dramatically effective, and the chances are that you will see that the world is just as often good as bad; that for every intriguer being led up the backstairs to success by a countess, you will see a man of merit and character, backed by his own deserts, stepping boldly in over the threshold: for each one who has been disillusioned and deceived you will see another who, believing in the best kind of success, is the more likely to achieve it and is striding joyfully forward into a world of fine possibilities."

The habit of moral clear-sightedness can and should be acquired in youth, as much as the material eyesight can be cultivated to distinguish a brown deer among the bracken or a grey sail in the grey distance of the sea. That clear-sightedness should teach us to

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call that which is stupid, stupid, and that which is clever, clever: but not to mix them up. It is not clever, but rather stupid, to believe that discrimination lies chiefly in seeing the faults and the seamy side of life. It requires quite as much discrimination to see the good side, especially when you are looking for the other. The world is neither all good nor all bad; do not make up your opinion of it on what people say, unless you are very sure of the speaker: the world as pictured in gossipy chatter about nothing at all does not sound a very desirable place. It is natural that if you talk about your neighbour and wish to be entertaining you will be unfavourably critical than the reverse. A caricature is a more diverting picture to look at than an ordinary photograph: it is more diverting to relate how Miss So-and-so remained out in the garden till nearly midnight with Lord Such-a-one than to say that after spending a quiet evening in her family circle she retired to

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bed at ten. But it is possible that she did it out of heedlessness, and did not realise how the time was passing; and though it is no doubt to be regretted that she should have been so unwise, the most regrettable part of the affair may be that Lord Such-a-one, after inviting her to go into the garden, should have related the incident to his friends afterwards, and made a note for the delectation of the next young lady of the foolish confidences that the one of last night whispered under the moon. And let us remember, besides, that such a confidence, even if repeated verbatim, does not and cannot reach us truly. Uttered under totally different conditions, and different surroundings, and probably led up to by something which brought it about quite naturally, it is bound by the time it reaches us at an afternoon tea-table to be as much distorted as a last ray of sunlight that comes through many layers of the atmosphere and reaches us in a more flaming intensity.

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Try not to found your imagined knowledge of men and women on such wretched materials as these. And for your part be discreet about the doings and sayings of others, until such discretion becomes a habit and a priceless possession. To sit and chatter eternally of what some other man or woman has said in some like moment of chattering idleness is unworthy of intelligent human beings, whether they are twenty or whether they are fifty. It is one thing in discussing some question of life or conduct to instance this person or that in support of a theory or an argument; it is another to sit and call up the name of one after another and relate something which makes them appear in a less favourable light. Women gossip, probably, more than men, at every stage—and not only at the moment when they are beginning to mix on equal terms with the grown-up world—mainly because they have more time to do it in. Young men, at the age of twenty, say, and for two

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or three years after that, have, happily for themselves, even before they begin their permanent career, some very definite centre for their occupations and their thoughts, since they are mostly at that time *in statu pupillari*, still at what is probably the most fruitful and enthralling time for intelligent minds, that is, the time when they are provided by outward influence with occupation sufficient, and indeed, almost to excess, without the responsibility of the next period. Here the young man has a distinct advantage over the young woman, for she, at the same age, with as much available energy, will in many cases not be provided as a matter of course with systematic mental occupation during that time, and it obviously requires more initiative, character, and invention to design and carry out a scheme of existence for one's self than it does simply and as a matter of course to comply with a scheme participated in by hundreds of others.

It is at this phase that leisure becomes

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the greatest snare. The various ways in which leisure is filled up by both men and women are, I believe, a far greater test of character, and aptitudes, and education than is their way of dealing with the succession of inevitable duties and occupations with which the life of each one of us gradually becomes filled as time goes on. Some people—it was perhaps a hard and fast maxim of the last generation more than of this—make a sort of fetish of the ordinance that time should never be "wasted." No doubt most of us would agree with that maxim, but we might differ a good deal as to what is meant by "waste." It is not a waste to have quite frankly some spaces not spent in a determined occupation. It is good sometimes to have spare moments to take breath in, and not to be forever on the rush from one thing to another. But it is pernicious to have so little definite to do of a permanent interest, apart from the encroaching flood of daily nothings, that if one has half-an-hour more

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than usual of spare time one has nothing joyfully to put into it which will make it a definite gain in the day instead of a loss. The desultory people, especially women, whose occupations, and therefore whose thoughts are mainly outside their walls instead of within, not only suffer themselves but make other people suffer when they find some extra time on their hands to put away somehow. Such will eagerly grasp at some excuse for rushing out, for inflicting their own incapacity, their barren stretches of existence on somebody else, talking to no purpose and with no result, and spreading a contagion not of the healthy enjoyable leisure which succeeds interested occupation, but of a dragging superfluity of time which profits nobody. This should truly be counted among the unpardonable sins. If you are not so fortunate as to have been born with a hobby, started in life with that comfortable familiar spirit always beside you to fill up each nook and cranny of spare time and thought, try now while you

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are young to discover one; feel about, seek one, find it at any price. I do not mean only some favourite form of violent exercise, though that also has its great advantage. I mean something that shall have a permanent and enduring value with the years, permeating thought and interest within doors as well as without. To have a handicraft which may at the same time employ the intelligence and invention seems to me the ideal hobby; or in default of that, some special study lying outside one's regular work, and not making too great demands on time and energy, while of interest enough to employ both. The saying "a little learning is a dangerous thing" constantly flung without context or comment in the face of the would-be student as well as of the smatterer, is responsible for blocking the way to a great deal of salutary pleasure. The real danger, I should have thought, lies not in the little learning, but in mistaking that little for a great deal, a peril which, unless we are on our guard against it, lies in wait for all of

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us at the rapturous moment of beginning to acquire any new piece of knowledge, whether from books or from life. A rapture probably succeeded by naif astonishment, mingled perhaps with discomfiture, at finding that the said knowledge is new only to one's self. I once heard a young woman say approvingly of some one she had been talking to, "Extraordinarily well-read that man is! *I don't think I have mentioned a piece of prose or poetry that he did not know.*" This is simply a form of our eternal stumbling-block, the danger of being too self-centred and of not realising that our neighbours at the same stage of existence as ourselves are probably going through much the same mental experience. To be self-centred, indeed, to a certain degree, is not a fault but a virtue. It is an essential and inevitable requirement of our conditions, as much as it is essential that a gardener who wishes to be successful should pay more attention to his own garden than to any one else's. Let us try quite simply and frankly to

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recognise this, to realise that we are each one of us shut up, so to speak, for the whole of our natural life with a being, a temperament, and intelligence, a character that we had no voice in choosing, but that we have a preponderating voice in making the best of: and that on that being, therefore, we must concentrate the main part of our thoughts, our energies, our struggles towards the light. And having realised this fact, let it make us less preoccupied with self instead of more so, let it teach us to understand the point of view of others, since it is probably the attitude of every human being, more or less, towards his own self; and, above all, let our concentration on our own path help us to avoid the possible stumbling-blocks in it, and not to jostle others aside to secure our own desires.

There is a wider form of being self-centred which extends to the family as well as to the individual. The tendency displayed by many otherwise reasonable people to believe that their own race is of quite peculiar interest,

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their own family traits the most worthy of note, the school they have been to the only possible one, the quarter of London they live in the most agreeable, and their house the best in it, is an insidious peril to be striven against in youth. It is a quite misleading conviction that, even if we do not unfortunately always choose a thing because it is the best, it becomes in some mysterious way the best because we have chosen it.

Learn to distinguish then, you who are young; go and choose the best, you to whom choice is still possible, and so arrange your lives that when you come to thirty-five, when you come to forty, you have something worth showing for it, and not only a series of abortive beginnings. That man or woman of forty will be you, remember, the young man or woman of to-day, and not somebody quite different with whom you have no concern. It will still be you, with either the faults intensified that you may have left unchecked, or the qualities which you have had courage and

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determination enough to put into their place. The human being I am speaking of is the one you are gradually building up now, who by your doing will be entitled, or the reverse, to justify in the years to come the fact of his existence. See to it then that he arrives at that moment of full maturity—at that central point of life when every man and woman of worth is a power and an influence in the world—in possession of a good conscience, a good understanding, good manners, and a good digestion.

We must dwell for a moment on the last of these, although it may seem an unheroic method of approach perhaps to the perfect life, but all the same we can hardly exaggerate its importance in the matter. On digestion depends the balance of nerves, energy, good temper, and—in addressing young women I would also add—a good complexion. The majority of those who are normal can have a good digestion by living with simplicity, eating enough of that which is nourishing,

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and refraining from stupid self-indulgence in the matter of food. It seems absurd, no doubt, to the young to take such care; but it is not nearly so absurd as they will seem twenty years later to the young people following them, when they are for ever fussing about their digestion and giving particulars of it to all their friends. It is absurd to talk of it, if you like, at any age. But it is not absurd, it is most wise, to exercise a sane and silent control over it from youth onwards. It is deplorable to see the usefulness of men and women seriously impaired as the years go on because of the hindrances to health and energy that they cruelly prepared when young for their more mature selves. How often do we hear—and not only, I must admit, from the young—"I can't resist having some more of that excellent thing, though I don't really want it," or see people unable to leave off eating, long after their appetite is satiated, from a dish of plumcake or chocolates placed within their reach. Leave it to the drunkard to say

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"I can't resist," albeit when he says it we are very much shocked, and wonder what he can possibly mean.

There is another error to which the young, girls more than boys perhaps, are liable in the matter of food, and which if not so injurious to their souls as greediness is almost equally harmful to their bodies; it is trying experiments of one kind and another with misplaced abstinence, in order to become slighter, or more active, or to fall in with some prevailing craze, or out of a spirit of asceticism unwisely exaggerated. Thirty years ago, when Mr. Banting gave the world his experiences in the art of reducing himself by diet, half the young women one saw were all for abjuring butter, potatoes, milk, in order to see what effect it would have on their figures. It very often had a most injurious effect on their health, at the moment when it was highly desirable they should be as well and wisely fed as possible. The combination of the healthy mind within the



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healthy body which we glibly admit to be our ideal when we meet with it as a Latin proverb, is apt to be neglected in everyday English practice. But it is within the reach, probably, of all those who set early enough about acquiring it, and who should keep unceasingly before them the conviction that with such an equipment life ought to be, and is, well worth living for either man or woman. The young of to-day, and of every day, are busy fashioning the world anew for us: it is not too much to ask of them that they should make a conscious constant effort to fashion it aright.

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# ON THE MERITS AND DEMERITS OF THRIFT

## AND OF CERTAIN PROVERBS REGARDING IT

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# ON THE MERITS AND DEMERITS OF THRIFT

## AND OF CERTAIN PROVERBS REGARDING IT

THERE are plentiful maxims in reference to this subject scattered broadcast through the pages of the moralists, and dwelt upon constantly in the greatest book of all. In every form of allegory, precept, and illustration we have all been taught, we have all learnt that it is wicked to be rich. I am not quite sure whether we all believe it, judging by the unflinching determination with which the attainment of that supreme wickedness is set before us as a potent factor in choosing a career, a given line of conduct. While with one tongue, so to speak, we tell our youths it is wicked to be rich, with another we dissuade them with all our might from the



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callings, the marriage, which might prevent them from being so. On one day in the week we listen to the solemn words which assure us that the wealthy will eventually be visited by so horrible a fate that, if there were any listening who actually and literally believed it, it is inconceivable that they should ever keep a spare sixpence in their pockets again. And yet, miracle of miracles! the very people who on the first day of the week appear to acquiesce in the idea that the rich man shall be eternally damned, can forget during the rest of it their conception of what those tremendous words may mean, and go on gaily qualifying themselves during five and a half sevenths of their lives (I am assuming the Saturday half-holiday) to be forever lost. It seems to me an unnecessary complication of the already sufficiently difficult problems of existence, to have to solve them alternately by two diametrically opposite codes. It is as though on one day in the week we committed to memory tables of arithmetic

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that inculcated that twice one are four and three times one are seven, and then, having these maxims absolutely by rote, we had, when it came to practical working, to admit that twice two come to four and three times one to three, in order to square them with the practical duties of life. Solomon says "A good name is better than riches;" and he almost invariably assumes that only one of these two alternatives can be adopted. I am no economist: I do not propose to discuss here why it appears to be inevitable that, as society is at present constituted, there should be inequalities in possession, and accumulations in individual hands. Let us simply recognise that such accumulations do take place, and admit that they are not generally, strange though it may seem after recalling the maxims we have been considering, in the hands of the criminal classes. There may be, and no doubt there are, many among the wealthy who use their means in a way unworthy of commendation; but on the whole

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I should imagine that a large proportion of them, whether their riches have been inherited or laboriously acquired, would—in accordance with the aforesaid weekday moralists, that is—not deserve to be lost at all, but quite the contrary.

What, after all, does money mean? Merely golden sovereigns? Do we, if we have them, sit all the time in our cellar running our skinny hands through the glittering pile? No, that is not what money means. It does not, to be sure, mean either the biggest things in life, for only inward grace can give those; but it can supplement the big things, in that it may give us the means of using them to the best advantage. Money cannot give the gift of making the friends worth having, or of deserving those friends: but it means greater and more agreeable possibilities of frequenting them. It cannot give us the power of understanding books, but to those who can understand it gives the power of buying them to read without

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stint. It cannot give the heaven-sent rapture in pictorial or musical art, but it gives the possibility of enjoying it more often. It cannot give us good and gifted children, but it may help us to train such children as we have, to advantage. The best is not to be bought with money, but the setting of the best is. For this reason is the possession of it a crucial test, especially when newly acquired: and it may be for those who have no gentle tastes to gratify with it a dazzling light suddenly shed on their barren existence, revealing with unsparing conspicuousness the vulgar channels in which it alone occurs to them that wealth should run.

It is no doubt good that wealth should be spent and not hoarded: the purpose of any currency is that it should ultimately be exchanged for something that it will buy. That the something should be worth having is of course essential. But what people spend their money on generally does, at the moment, appear to themselves to be worth

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buying. It is other people who feel it is not. It is better no doubt that what money brings us should add to the beauty and the seemliness of life, whether we buy with it things or ideas. That is the thing to grasp. Let us recognise, as sanely and wisely as we can, that the defects incidental to the possession of wealth need not be inevitable, if we are on our guard against them. The limitations of taste and character which wealth so unsparingly gives us an opportunity of displaying are not caused by it, any more than a limelight shed on an unprepossessing object creates the ugliness it reveals. Let us not fear to say that in itself it is not wicked to be rich, any more than it is estimable to be poor; but let us keep unsparingly before our eyes the deterioration of character that may be brought about by either the lack or the excess of means, and be on our guard against it. This is an insidious and a great danger. For there are two qualities which most of us agree are

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fine and good, and to be desired, that are liable to be modified and distorted by the variations in our means. One is the large-hearted impulse to part with what we have, not for our own good only, but for that of the community or of individuals; the other is the spirit of a sober self-denial opposed to self-indulgence. This, the spirit of temperance: that, the spirit of magnificence.

But we cannot, in the perfunctory teaching of morals which is all we have time for in these days, make it clear to ourselves and to others how important it is that these finer impulses should not be at the mercy of our varying conditions. We are apt, in the hurry of material life, to lose sight of this main point at issue: to confuse enforced distasteful acts of economy with a noble impulse of sober simplicity; we are misled into attributing the constant and cruel necessity forced on the great majority of mankind, of spending and of buying less than they would like to spend or to buy, to a fine spirit of self-

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denial, and we gradually grow into considering the mere act of saving as a virtue in itself. But it is not there that virtue lies.

There are certain qualities necessary to a complicated social organisation — Thrift is one of them—which, encouraged at first on grounds of expediency, have become through the ages so indispensable to the state of society which calls them forth, that they are erected into virtues, necessary to the ideal character: and taught to one generation after another, indelibly impressed on them. And that quite indiscriminately: for we are obliged to embody our teaching of morals in a series of rough and ready uncompromising maxims, that we impart to all alike, whatever the circumstances of the learner. There is no leisure in the evil days we have fallen upon, for our teachers to expound with care to reverent disciples how infinitely varying are the canons and obligations of what we may call the lesser virtues, — to point out and to distinguish, in a dignified, exhaustive,

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and philosophical fashion, as those who teach in groves. The result is that they attempt to guide the whole of our kind by precepts fitted for one portion of them, and absolutely unfitted for another. The terse and pithy maxims in which the experience of generations finds its final form, although they may serve, crudely enough, as a working basis of conduct, are unavoidably apt to lead us astray by not presenting alternatives. It is obvious that there must be a want of half-tones, so to speak, about such definite utterances; for if a proverb were to attempt to qualify its own authority by pointing out the cases in which it may be modified, it would cease to be so portable a piece of wisdom, and would more resemble a speech or a sermon. We are therefore driven into the constant and immense mistake of inflicting the same ordinances on every one alike. And in the particular subject we are discussing, we commit the absurdity of laying down for rich and poor

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alike the same rule; and, instead of admitting that there is a certain line of conduct, not wicked, but only highly inexpedient and unadvisable for those who are poor, and entirely allowable in those who are the reverse, we lay down the same precept for all indiscriminately, and call it a virtue. Since, therefore, there are more people, unfortunately, in the world with little money than with much, since there are more who are under the obligation to provide for their necessaries only, and not for the superfluities, we must needs, so we are told, adopt the maxim which should govern the majority; and the minority must therefore hobble through existence cramped by the ordinances made to fit the narrowly circumstanced, until the minds of the easy become inevitably crippled and narrowed too. "A penny saved is a penny gained"—"Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves"—"Turn a penny in your pocket before you take it out"—such are

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some of the stultifying maxims we learn to repeat until, upon my soul, they can never quite be unlearnt again. "Penny wise and pound foolish," one of the few utterances on the other side of the question, sometimes arises to stagger us by confronting us with an entirely opposite admonition to those we have acquired the habit of obeying.

I recall a saying I used to hear in my youth—we were expected to allow it reverently to sink into our minds until it became part of our code of morals—"When you are going to buy a thing, think first if you want it; and, secondly, if you can do without it." Do without it? Why, all the beautiful, and most of the agreeable, things of life can be "done without," in the sense that we do not die of renouncing them; we only become stupidly limited human beings if we carry that principle to its extreme limit, and never get anything we can do without. Here, again, we encounter the absurdity of trying to make such a propo-

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sition of universal application, with the monstrous result that, framed for those who could only afford to buy the necessaries of life, it has been adopted by many others who could have afforded very much more, and who actually think they are being praiseworthy in keeping their lives as barren and unadorned as possible. There are characters with regard to whom such a system as this combines the evil influences of both poverty and riches, and brings out the finer results of neither. It is impossible to advance through the world in a stately and seemly fashion if you are for ever stumbling over little wooden precepts: there cannot be a noble amplitude of moral gesture if every time the hand is extended the action is accompanied by a corresponding impulse to draw it back. The instinctive impulse to save ungracefully on small occasions, when it is not worth while to make a deliberate effort to overcome it, may exist side by side with an impulse towards equally ungraceful self-indulgence.

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This is not magnificence: that is not temperance. And the man with many pennies, brought up on the maxim suitable to the man with few, will probably, if he is that way inclined, have the tendency to keep a penny in his pocket when he had better take it out. But let us call things by their proper names. A first-class passenger giving an inadequate tip to a railway porter, or a man in a fur coat refusing a penny to the street loafer who opens the door of his brougham, is not exercising self-denial or practising thrift; he is obeying a sedulously implanted instinct of saving, that is all. Those ugly little economies have no relation to the renunciation, fine if exercised in the right spirit, of the man who goes on foot because he cannot afford an omnibus; or without his newspaper because his wife and children want the money for their clothes. There is something stern and noble in that form of saving; but there is something the reverse of noble when the same



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action is unnecessary, and is not prompted by Thrift, but by that half-brother of Thrift, whose name is Stinginess. The man who is able to travel about Europe in first-class carriages will be furiously indignant at having to pay, it may be, five francs more on some given occasion than he expected; but one of the good things money is able to buy, is equanimity on such an occasion, immunity from the inroads and vexations at such small complications, immunity even from invariably vindicating the rights of absolute justice.

It may sometimes happen that a man who will spend a thousand pounds on a fine picture—and if he can see with his own eyes that it is a fine picture and can be uplifted by living in its presence, he is incalculably right so to spend it—will think twice before he buys an extra copy of the *Times* to read on his way home, or before he gives a cabman an extra sixpence on a cold day. And yet, if that rich man wasted pennies and overpaid cabmen to the extent

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of even a shilling a day, which would seem to most millionaires very extravagant, the net result would only amount to £18, 5s. od. in one year, the price of one of his wife's cheaper gowns. But to effect that saving in a lump sum by going without the gown, in order to have a small daily margin, supposing that only one of these alternative courses can be adopted, does not appear often to occur to the minds of the people concerned. Why? because we have persuaded ourselves that we had better take care of the pence than the pounds. What we buy with the thousand pounds is not really the picture, what we save with the pennies is not the satisfaction of obeying a sage impulse of economy; it is the attitude of mind that we are buying, that we are intensifying, every time we consolidate it in one direction or another. For this is a terrible danger that may await us, that the doors closed by our own action against fine and noble possibilities become more and more inevitably sealed by the

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action of time, until at last we forget that they were ever open. There are always, unhappily, under all conditions of life, some doors that we close, some possibilities we stifle for ever; and it may happen to us as well in poverty as in riches, only the possibilities stifled will be of a different kind. Terrible snares as to the directing of character lie in the way of both. By poverty I do not here mean that absolute poverty of the slums, in which each penny lacked means a corresponding deprivation of actual food, warmth or shelter. I mean that other poverty, hard also to bear, whose necessities include superfluities which have to be renounced by an endless series of efforts of self-denial. There should be different names for these two forms of lack of means, or at any rate for the different forms of suffering they inflict, in the one case mainly physical, and the other mental, for it becomes confusing, blurring, and entirely misleading if we try to compare them

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on actually the same grounds and using the same words. The list, as we go up through different layers of the social order, of those called upon to face deprivations and renunciations may include people of a station and position obliging them to live in a measure according to the standards of the wealthy and distinguished. This is a thing difficult to bear with simplicity and dignity, and in those who lack those qualities, and who, whatever their social position or their absolute means, conceive they have not enough, it sometimes gives rise to the most curious manifestations. Is not this one of the foxes that ought to be kept under one's cloak? Not, perhaps, from the point of view of the financial equilibrium of society, but simply from that of making the social relations of human beings with one another seemly, agreeable, and dignified. The person who in a smart drawing-room laments aloud over her lack of means—I say "her" advisedly, for this seems to be an error that women are more likely to fall into

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than men—is hardly less unpleasant than the one who on the same occasion loudly proclaims the fact of having money in superfluity. To be sure, we tolerate one manifestation more readily than the other, because the combination of high social claims with inadequate means is on the whole more likely to produce a bearable result than the opposite combination of too ample means with inadequate standards. This is the reason perhaps why we do not protest more loudly against the neighbour who, lying necessarily beyond the reach of offers of help, persists in explaining her existence in the terms of pounds, shillings, and pence, and so bringing money, in words as well as in deeds, prominently into the foreground as almost the principal factor of life. Such conditions, in natures which are not noble, are apt to engender a concentration upon the petty details of existence, a habit of selection not governed by high standards, but by an adjustment to possibilities. This is a possible danger of

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both limited and unlimited means. In the former case the ideals may fade and standards become blurred by the interposition of ignoble preoccupations; in the latter, from its not being absolutely essential that a wise reflection and weighing of alternatives should accompany the process of selection, the capacity to select is again likely to suffer. The finer tastes and discriminations are not necessarily brought to their greatest perfection by being able to afford to get the second best as well as the best, by being able, without a thought, to make a trial of something that may be inadequate in order to discard it afterwards, it may be, for something not more desirable.

There is a danger in an existence too easy-going and prosperous of losing hold on the finer, stronger aspirations, on the virtue of sobriety and temperance in the widest sense; a danger of being gradually overlaid by an abundance of detail and ornament, in every order a sign of decadence. In the noble nature, on the other hand, which succeeds

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in governing its fate instead of being governed with it, in keeping hold of the ideal in the face of poverty, the finer stronger virtues are likely to be engendered by scanty means more than in the case of the prosperous who hold on their satisfied way in an existence subject to the continued encroachment of self-indulgence both of the body and of the spirit.

I am not pausing to discuss here the desirability that the affluent should employ part of their means in a way which appears to most people so obviously "right," according to the received doctrines of altruism, that it is needless to spend time in discussing it. I am not going to repeat a thought that occurs in so many wise and foolish forms to most human minds at either end of the social scale, that part of the means of the rich should be consecrated to helping those who deserve help, or even those who simply need it. In both cases I would say incidentally that it is possible, by taking trouble enough, to find

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out whether they do either the one or the other, though this is more trouble than enunciating a general reluctance to "pauperise." It may sometimes be allowable to act for the legitimate advantage of the individual on lines which would not be practicable if applied to the community. But the welfare of the two appear at first sight so inextricably intertwined that it is no doubt easier to say that the one must not be attempted for fear of endangering the other, than carefully and patiently to disentangle the threads that bind them together, and take the considerable trouble that it means to arrive at distinguishing.

And as for the really absolutely poor, those in whom every generous impulse, every offer of help, every contribution towards the needs of another means, as the French say, paying with their person, means depriving themselves of that they have, to give to some one else, sitting up themselves at night by a neighbour's sick bed, and thus practically taking

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their share of another's trouble, — I would almost go so far as to say that certain high virtues engendered by such an attitude of mind are practically unknown among those who, under similar circumstances, simply draw out their purse, or write a letter . . . . and send some one else. It is probably unavoidable. These acts of daily heroism and self-sacrifice, accomplished as a matter of course at the cost of personal fatigue, suffering and privation, are things that cannot be learnt in theory, and are likely to be practised but very exceptionally by those who can exercise them by proxy. Is it true, then, after all—can it be?—that there is a high level of moral achievement which may be difficult for the rich to attain? certain qualities, and those of the finest kind, which are bound to lie dormant if circumstances do not call them forth? If so, let us seek for the remedy in the right place. Thrift is not the virtue we need here. It is not so simple as that. It is self-denial we want, power of

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resistance. We need to make a vigorous stand against the action of surroundings and circumstances lest we should fall a helpless prey to them, to keep alive by constant effort the conviction that it is necessary to resist them. But it is possible that those whose lives are sunny and prosperous may mistake the content and satisfaction they feel, for a condition of moral excellence in which watchfulness is not so much needed. Plato tells us that it is difficult to be cheerful when you are old and poor: and we may presume therefore that it is not difficult when you are old and rich. But even granting that that is so, which it certainly is not invariably —otherwise we should have a whole class of cheerful old rich whose existence would be of the greatest gain to the community—that is not the highest form of excellence. That is the sort of well-being that comes from repletion: you have had your fill of the good things of life, and can sit down well content. But that is not philosophical and spiri-

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tual calm, arrived at by effort and aspiration. The obvious and disheartening condition of the people who have had enough is that they do not want more, and therefore do not try to attain it. This it is that may stop the strenuous impulse, both of a moral and mental kind; for the intelligence, as well as the character, may mistake the satisfactory development arrived at by helpful circumstance for natural endowment. But still this condition, this kind of "goodness," which is what, on the whole, the most favourably situated average human being may hope to attain, is of the kind which is the second best. For after admitting the value of money in procuring the possession, or even in eking out the perception, of the really good things in this world, we must recognise that these are still joys of the second order. The chosen know something else. There are, happily, some left in the world who, having but little means, do not care about having more, all their desires and their possibilities being

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divinely absorbed in the possession of some great and glorious gift—or even, failing the gift, the contemplation and pursuit of some lofty ideal.

The glowing spark of endeavour strenuously kept alive by ceaseless effort until it is fanned into an unquenchable flame; the passionate concentration of purpose in the facing of privation; the unconscious effort at readjustment that may inspire the genius in his need with a fury of purpose to poise his balance with destiny more evenly—all this, in its fulness, is inconsistent with riches. There is something in the fact of the luxurious cushioned existence, flooded without any personal effort with light and warmth, which seems in some terrible way to put out for ever the flame from within, or at best to prevent it from burning with more than a pale flicker. The mere fact of the possession of ample means is likely to induce a greater variety of surroundings, of occupation, of intercourse, and must break in on the

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determination to achieve the single-minded purpose kept before the eyes of him who has nothing else to look upon. The wealthy man may be a patron of the arts, a connoisseur, an amateur; he may be supported by a deluding inward consciousness, that had things been otherwise he might still have conquered fame and opulence for himself. It is better that it should be so, or rather, I would say, that since it is inevitable that it should be so, let him think that it is better. For it is not given to us, happily, to determine in which layer of the social strata we should like ourselves to be cast, whether with those who have more or who have less, or those who are between, in that middle state which poets and thinkers have assured us is the golden, the happy state of all. Shall we dare in the face of their utterances to hint that it is not? and yet . . . . why is it golden? why is it happiest? because it is the state which makes for a selfish well-being without responsibility as without incentive?

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let us say boldly that the mind that can dare, endure, attempt, would never choose to be "seated in the mean" if it could have something else. The highest achievement is not being content with *that* seat, the highest striving is not compatible with it. No! in my heart I believe that mediocrity is not golden. It is leaden. It weighs down aspiration, it hinders accomplishment, it deadens hope: it lacks alike the spur of poverty and the encouragement of wealth, it stagnates instead of battling or rushing. There lies the danger of the middle course, different, it may be, from that which menaces either riches or poverty, but danger still.

But since these different strata are governed by different conditions, and, as applied to detail, different standards; since for some who are within the iron grasp of necessity the alternatives are few, and for others for whom proclivity and not necessity may decide, more numerous; since all alternatives make demands on character and aptitudes,

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and since those, therefore, who have many alternatives have a more searching test applied to them than those who have fewer,—it would be inestimably helpful to us all if we might have a code of life varied in detail according to different circumstances. Such a code would be more pliable, more practicable, more possible than the crude inelastic rule intended for any one section of society only, by which all the others, nevertheless, attempt to grope their way. It would be possible for us to face once for all the fact that we are not necessarily wicked if we are rich, nor good if we are poor: and that it is not by trying to adopt the methods of dealing with money that are desirable in the poor that the rich will remove the traditional stain attaching to their condition. They will have to do more than that.

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# THE LOT OF THE SERVANT

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# THE LOT OF THE SERVANT

WE hear a great deal in these days of the difficulties connected with the question of domestic service, both on the side of the serving and of the served. Human beings who are forced by circumstances into daily contact must, in whatever relation they stand to each other, inevitably come into unpleasant collision at times. All intercourse based on compulsory juxtaposition must be occasionally difficult; and most difficult of all, probably, under those conditions in which to the one side is ascribed by convention the right to command and to the other the obligation to obey.

I will not attempt to discuss in these pages, on broad general grounds, the relation of employer and employed. I am not competent



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to deal with so vast a question, involving the eternal conflict and readjustment of unequal social forces. I am ready with no general scheme of reform. I am not prepared to advocate the employment of either machinery or gentlewomen to replace our vanishing cooks and housemaids. The time will slowly, gradually, inevitably come when the incessant shifting and alteration of social conditions must bring about fresh social expedients: let us in the meantime see if we cannot make endurable a state of things not yet ripe for actual remedy.

The great majority of households in this country are administered by women, and served mostly by women. We will consider it therefore from that point of view. It is generally the mistresses and not the masters of households who have to deal as best they may, in some empiric fashion, with the phase of the arduous problem presented within their own four walls. How do they approach it? The average woman, taking one class with

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another, has not a mind and character constructed on fine, noble, generous lines; yet it is most miserably in the hands of these thousands of average keepers of the house that it lies day after day to deal with the question we are discussing, day after day to add their mistakes to the sum of those of others, until the whole system appears to be one gigantic mistake. Perhaps it is a mistake, perhaps it is not. "Time will show," as we delude ourselves by saying, forgetting that Time is ironically apt to put the question to one generation and to show the answer to the next. Domestic service may very possibly, as some say, be on the verge of undergoing some radical transformation, which will practically put an end to it altogether, or it may be destined to continue under modified conditions. We who are the mistresses of to-day are happily not called upon to be the prophetesses as well, or to forecast the form in which those changes may take place. In any case we shall probably not be there to see.

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Nor, happily, is it incumbent upon us to say all there is to be said or to think all there is to be thought on the principle of Servitude, or the Labour Question. Our duty, of a less imposing and more practical kind, lies before us plainly enough, for those who will see it: it is to make the best of things as they are, pending the moment of making them what they should be.

The possession of authority offers unlimited evil opportunities to the meaner natures, ranging from the lodging-house keeper who bullies her slavey to the lady of title who vents her ill-humour upon her maid. Add to this that the great mass of servants, as well as the great mass of mistresses, are not often endowed with tact, sympathy, or sweet temper in any marked degree; and we shall find that the materials are not promising out of which to construct a harmonious and agreeable relation between employer and employed. But these are the only materials which lie to our hand and

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we have got to use them: these and no others It is with us, the employers, that lies the chief responsibility of bettering the situation in some way which will make it endurable for the moment. Our subordinates have enough to do in filling up the practice of every day under our somewhat spasmodic direction, without being called upon for a perfect theory of life as well. It is a thousand pities that the pressure of public opinion prevents intelligent women from discussing their servants to any extent in general society, and considering together individual cases which so very often throw an instructive light on the big general question. It is in fact a subject practically tabooed in ordinary social intercourse, and this mainly because of the foolish utterances of foolish women who spend their time in relating tales of the petty misdemeanours of their domestics, tales which do but too often bring into lurid evidence the shortcomings of the employer. This is not the way to

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investigate the subject to any profit. But since the question confronts sooner or later every educated woman in the kingdom, we must investigate it; we ought to discuss it: it should be one of our principal subjects of preoccupation to realise our attitude towards it, not only from the point of view of the derelictions of others, but also of our own. Let us be quite frank with ourselves. Let us realise where we stand in relation to this important question, and what is our attitude towards it; realise how in truth we label this close daily relation to those of a different education and tradition from ourselves. The word "truth," indeed, is almost too weighty to toss about to one point and another of this discussion, to apply to an artificial condition of society probably destined to pass away. But we can have something, a set of opinions, convictions, if you will, which for the moment stand to us for the truth, or at any rate for our impulse towards it; and it is that impulse which

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makes us honest and upright, even if our conclusion may be a mistaken one which we abandon afterwards. But let us take care that these convictions do not stand between us and the best way of handling the situation; that they do not mislead instead of guiding us. If only it were possible that we should by some yet unknown process have an instantaneous photograph of what is going on in our own minds we should probably be as much surprised as we are when we see photographs of people walking and apparently going about on their heels. In the minds of some of us, whose haphazard methods alternate between success and failure, the camera might reveal the unspoken, unwritten conviction that the existence of hewers of wood and drawers of water is taken for granted, to the extent, indeed, that if enough such persons are not forthcoming to serve us, we actually make a grievance of the fact. We assume tacitly that they must exist, since they are needed for our

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convenience, but that if they do not carry out our ordinances their existence is not justified; that they should be treated kindly, in some careless fashion, when there is no reason to the contrary, but legitimately treated otherwise when we feel ill or tired. This, we might find, would be the condition of half the average households from which we would glean statistics. Now let us turn to another species of employer, who with painstaking and deliberate intention tries to imagine herself into the point of view of those she employs, and to the best of her ability behaves in accordance with it. I believe that the danger here is that she will find so many ready-made opinions to her hand, she will start with so many well-meant but obscuring generalisations that she will be totally unable to see things as they are. In her heart of hearts she will probably attribute to her domestics a feeling of conscious resentment at the subordinate position in which they have been placed by destiny,

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a constant undying wish for independence, a sense of grievance at not possessing it. She unconsciously, in trying to imagine their minds, represents them by her own.

Here also, I believe, are falsities which we need to sweep away, and here is where the crying need of honesty towards ourselves and others comes in. Let us try to describe the situation with absolute honesty. Let us frankly admit that the mistress of a household is condemned to the end of the time that she shall deal with the question to do so partly in the dark; that it must remain eternally as impossible to her fully to realise what is going on in the minds of those she employs in domestic service, as it is for them clearly to comprehend hers. She must inevitably, in picturing their point of view, mingle her own with it, her own standards, her own outlook, her desires, and they will unconsciously do the same by hers. What will seem to her the salient point in the aptitudes, the capacities, the

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preferences of another class will be, as it is in that of another country, in truth the point where they differ most from herself. She would probably be mistaken also in invariably assuming on their part a constant indignant inward protest at the unjustly distributed balance of circumstances. For that it is unjustly distributed, in the sense that the individual destinies of any group of people are probably in no case based on the deserts of each individual, it would be difficult to doubt. But given that injustice, given that unequal distribution, let us not invariably attribute the same view of things to those we employ as we should feel in our minds, with our present training, if our outlook were the same as theirs. The minds of the educated, their intelligence, their imagination, fed by incessant contact in books and in speech with the imagination and experience of others, and deflected in one direction or another by the measureless influence of time, tradition,

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and surroundings, must necessarily be susceptible in a more acute degree to the various phenomena of existence than are the minds of the educated. It is those varying susceptibilities induced by habit and education which create our impression of the world we live in and give us the standard of that which is desirable or undesirable, tolerable or intolerable. We assume that there are certain human joys and sorrows before which all men are equal, which lie for all on the same plane of rejoicing or of suffering: and it is well, for purposes of practical conduct, to assume that it should be so. But yet in our hearts we know even this equality to be a good deal a convention. The same incident, the same misfortune even, happening to two people with entirely different outlooks on life is no longer the same, it is something different.

There are some forms of suffering absolute, so to speak; there are others of suffering relative, arising from the fact that the con-

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ditions of the surrounding universe fall short of the standard which the sufferer has grown to consider necessary. We have all been taught to believe that Pity is a virtue almost divine, and we cultivate that virtue in ourselves with an inward glow of self-satisfaction, without realising that we often expend it in a quite mistaken direction. The real immense hardship of the servant's lot is to be governed by the petty, the mean-minded. For that let us pity them, and pity every man and woman, in whatever position in life, who is daily and hourly subject to such. But do not let us pity them for certain things which would be hardship to ourselves if we did them, but which are no hardship to those who have taken such things for granted from their birth. It seems to me to be a misleading sentimentality to ignore this very radical difference of outlook and standard. Let us, in endeavouring justly to estimate and alleviate the sufferings of those dependent on us, have the candour to admit to our-

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selves that we should probably suffer acutely if we were called upon to partake of their pleasures.

I will cite from among many others two facts that will show the truth of my allegation. A royal princess, finding herself by chance one day in a crowd, and having unaccountably not been preserved in the customary manner from the contact of the multitude, turned round and said, with a concentrated expression of indignant disgust at the horrible undreamt-of experience, "Why, what is that? I—I—believe somebody touched me!" As a counterpart to this is the following incident: There had been a terrible crowd, in which lives had well-nigh been lost, in the streets of a provincial town during an election, and a certain gentlewoman, much concerned to find that a working woman of her acquaintance had been in the thick of it, expressed her sympathy. "Lor', mum!" replied the other, much surprised at this point of view, and

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with an expression of glowing rapture on her face, "but a' do loike a good scroonch!" The moral of this is that many many incidents, many conditions of daily life to which the servant class is exposed, and which appear to those placed above them the most terrible trials, do not appear in the same light to the imagined sufferers. That is why it seems to me that the expedient suggested at intervals, of trying to import on to this lower level the service of gentlewomen, who must start handicapped by a whole range of drawbacks and difficulties to the ordinary servant non-existent, does not offer much hope of solving the domestic problem.

The lady-servant must necessarily waste a good deal of tissue either in constant incessant readjustment of standard or in heroically pretending to ignore differences; and always, inevitably, have a false distorted view of what the condition of life really is that she is trying to occupy: an entirely different view from that of the

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person who would naturally occupy it. I am using, no doubt, unscientific terms; I am not contending that it is an ideal condition, or even an inevitable condition, to have masters and servants, or employers and employed; but since during a lengthened period of social evolution these conditions have arisen, there are, at this time of day, certain people of whom it is practically correct to say that they "naturally" occupy one or another of these positions, and each one of them probably will be most successful in life in filling that niche towards which he or she "naturally" gravitates. There is, in my opinion, no eternal virtue in trying to precipitate the slow insensible fusion of society by seeking to ignore differences in our present social standing, and to import the service of gentlewomen into households where there are servants of a different class as well. I have seen instances in which the expedient was tried and did not succeed; not because the gentlewoman was not heroi-



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cally determined to do her best and accept everything that came in her way, but because she was always, even if involuntarily and unconsciously, kept at arm's length by those of a different breeding with whom she had to work, and made to feel that she had undertaken duties that in the partition of life did not legitimately belong to her.

One of the chief precepts inculcated by our early training is that the wish for independence is one of the cardinal virtues. In practice, however, when that desire is manifested to excess in any degree of the hierarchy, it is most inconsistently looked upon and dealt with as entirely the reverse. There are, no doubt—and woe to the world if there were not—an immense number of men and women burning with a passionate desire for the independence that has been denied to them, for the right to live their own lives, to have glorious portions of time for which they are accountable to no one but themselves,

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time in which to cherish possibility and dream of achievement. But we must also recognise on the other hand that in a large proportion of people in every class, and especially among women, is implanted strongly the desire to be ruled, to obey, to be one of a graded community, to be in submission to some visible authority, to have the path of duty neatly pointed out by convenient sign-posts at every hundred yards and never for a minute to have the responsibility one's self of wondering where it lies. To be so situated that one has the possibility of different courses of action is, in any position of life, to have the possibilities of many mistakes. It is not on the whole a bad way of going straight to the desired end, although a somewhat inglorious method perhaps, to walk through life between two walls, not seeing what lies either on the one side of them or on the other. And when that path has become by habit a tolerably congenial one and the suc-

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cession of recurring daily duties can be so arranged as to fill up the time without breathlessly overcrowding it, the result should be something not unlike peace of mind. I believe it to be the feeling of satisfied conscience combined with the steadying sense of having every day and all day something obvious to do, with no mental strain in selecting or in executing it, that has led to the deifying of manual labour, which appears in the mind of some poets to offer more opportunities for heroism than some other forms of less conspicuous duty. The latter may nevertheless be far more difficult and demand a greater effort of self-denial. Those who celebrate in verse and in prose the divineness of drudgery must necessarily belong to the class of the lettered and articulate, that is, with few exceptions, to the class that does not and cannot see manual labour as it appears to those for whom it is the inevitable channel of activity. There is some-

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thing beautiful, no doubt, in the spirit of self-sacrifice in which, in case of need, one with finer aptitudes and possibilities would content herself with eternally sweeping a room. But this seems to me quite a falsifying standard to take for the doings of those in domestic service. The counterpart of the spirit in which the ordinary servant sweeps a room is not that with which her mistress would take a broom and sweep it too, but rather the spirit—without enthusiasm probably as without complaint—with which the latter fulfils her own daily round of duties, often tedious and monotonous, no doubt, like any daily routine.

This is not the place to discuss so big a question as the initial equality or inequality of human beings. In many respects, no doubt, they are all equal: in the number of their bones and of their muscles, in the component parts of their physical frame: they may even, over a large number, be

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equal in the average of the intellectual and moral possibilities they start with, if subjected to exactly the same treatment and given the same opportunities. But since from the crowding and complication of our social machinery they are not given, as a matter of fact, the same opportunities, the artificially induced inequality plays pretty much the same part as if it were congenital. Of two people five feet high, the one who is standing on a mound, even if artificial and of his own raising, which elevates him by a foot, will still be as much a foot higher than the other as though he had grown to that height by the unassisted development of his own frame, and will be able to see correspondingly farther. Let us then, for the moment, decently, soberly, and unhysterically, take this artificially induced inequality for granted, and even assume that those who for the present—it may not be for long—are standing on the lower level are not all dying

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to pull down those who are on the higher one and to take their place. Let us frankly admit, what after all is a platitude, that there is a tendency in some human beings to be leaders, and in some with less initiative to be subordinate. Let us realise that in course of time, by a series of chances, one quite ordinary and average human being may find himself, or let us rather say in this context, herself, in the position of commanding another quite ordinary fellow-creature of about the same capacity; and be nevertheless in a relation towards the latter which may make an entirely satisfactory working basis for life, if the business contract between them is based on justice and common sense, and is carried out with a judicious admixture of sentiment but not sentimentality. It is well to remember also that it is a contract in which, though both sides may have an equal amount of obligations, the obligations are of entirely different kinds. I remember hearing of an

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excellent bishop who, when his carriage came to the door to fetch him from a pleasant social gathering at an hour when it would have been quite reasonable to stay longer, said, "I do not allow my coachman to keep me waiting, I will not therefore set him a bad example by keeping him waiting." But in this the bishop—I trust I may say this without profanity—seemed to me rather stupid. His admirable words sounded quite plausible, and no doubt impressed his hearers, but I cannot help thinking that his theory of life was false. The contract between him and his coachman was that the bishop paid the coachman a certain sum a year on the condition that the coachman gave him his time, or so much of it at any rate as is included by common consent in the duties of a coachman, and that presumably his engagements and wishes were subordinate to those of his employer. It may appear to some of us, therefore, that to try to adjust the situation so that the

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bishop's time should also be at the command of his coachman was a piece of sentimentality which must have considerably interfered with the working of life. But to go to this extreme, sentimentality though it be, is at any rate preferable to the curious disregard on the part of many employers, women especially, to the need for intervals of absolute leisure on the part of their servants, that leisure which, when work is accomplished, means their own individual life and pleasures. The amazing idea that underlies the domestic scheme of many housewives, not definitely formulated perhaps, but quite definitely acted on, is that their servants should be constantly at work, and that if they have any spare time on their hands it means that they have not enough to do. I heard the other day—it would have been laughable if it had not been at the same time something rather to weep over—a mistress of a household, who is used herself to put to some profit two or

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three hours at most out of the twenty-four, complaining that she had found one of her servants sitting with her arms folded, doing nothing. But why not? It seems to me rather an evidence of prompt competence for a servant to have a margin of time in which to sit with her arms folded, after achieving the work she was engaged to do. It is not part of the contract, as employers of the kind I have described seem to think, that a servant should be quite incessantly employed. That is one of the prejudices which should be strenuously combated.

With relation to any subordinates, whether in age or position, the way of safety for those above them lies in diminishing as much as possible the catalogue of possible crimes. Here common sense and knowledge of domestic matters should be brought to bear. We are not dealing with questions of eternal right and wrong, but with the reciprocal conditions of the bargain and the maintenance of

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cleanliness and order in the house. If the doorstep is left uncleaned, it is right that the maid whose duty it is to clean it should be rebuked, because that is part of what she has contracted to do; but she has not contracted, when the doorstep is done, never to look out of the window into the street, or never to wear an ostrich feather in her hat when she is off duty, or not to read a novel or to play at cards, or anything suitable within the bounds of decorum, when her work is finished.

The small amount of recognised spare time, and the impossibility of having any absolute leisure within doors not liable to be impinged upon by superior authority, is no doubt one of the reasons why so many young people of to-day fight shy of entering domestic service. Young girls, in whatever position in life, long for amusement, long for the possibility of choosing that amusement for themselves and having, according to the received formula, "time they can call their own." Can this not

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be attained? It is no good for the housewives to content themselves with running from one agency to another and then complain that the supply of servants is dwindling. Nor is it much more effectual that they should set to work to consider why it is so dwindling, if, when they arrive at some conclusion and find a reason, they stop there, and do nothing to remedy it,—nothing, that is to say, on some small and feasible scale in their own household. One reason probably why the present state of things is unsatisfactory is that either employers do nothing to remedy it at all, or else they put forth with the best intentions one scheme after another of reform on a large scale, for which the time is not yet ripe.

Some suggest that the employment of gentlewomen will permeate domestic service with the advantages it lacks; others, that the work should be done by servants living out of the house—an arrangement, by the way,

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which would involve women servants going to and fro in the streets late at night and early in the morning, at all seasons, and in all weathers—some look for salvation to mechanical appliances; others to skilled labour; others to a plan which has, I believe, already been tried in Scotland, that the work usually done by servants should be instead divided amongst the family of the master and his guests. Each of these schemes probably has its advantages, if it could be carried out as intended and as set forth on paper. Unhappily, however, any project of national reform on a large scale, whether concerning Domestic Service, the Labour Question, the Housing of the Poor, Education even, or any other subject of vital importance to the community, is bound from the nature of things to be formulated by chosen minds, by persons fairly prominent, who are never from the nature of things among the great mass of those liable to be practically affected by it. It is then

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perforce in its working translated into action by the ordinary human being, or worse; it succeeds with some, it fails with others; the failures are necessarily more conspicuous than the successes, since it is they who raise a clamour of complaint, and then we all cry out that the scheme is a bad one. We forget the fact that we started it with the initial mistake of assuming that it could be worked out with mathematical certainty; whereas, on the contrary, all the units to which it is applied will have a personal variation of their own, constantly making the good result fall short in one direction or another. It is as though in adding up a sum some of the figures should suddenly decline to combine peacefully with their next neighbour; as though three when added to four should refuse one day to become seven, but should insist on being nine instead. That is the difficulty in dealing with any problem to be worked out in the terms of human beings: and I ven-

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ture to suggest that that is why there are so many obstacles in the way of making successful plans for their welfare. Here again, however, I approach issues too wide for me to deal with. I would like, therefore, simply to consider if it would not be possible for us—that is, for those Englishwomen who are mistresses of households—to tide over by earnest and honest endeavour this difficult and ugly join in human experience, so to speak, which we are constantly seeing and hearing referred to as the Crisis in Domestic Service. Let us take an example from another quasi-domestic difficulty, that of the London householder who would like to see the street he lives in kept clean. One way, no doubt, of effecting this would be that the State should clean all the streets. But if it does not do so efficiently, then the next best plan would seem to be that every householder should clean that piece of the street for which he is responsible, which would pre-

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sumably obtain the desired result. Let us imagine then, even though it may verge upon a fairy-tale, a Street of Content in which this should be effected, a street in which outside every dwelling the pavement is swept, the roadway fair and wholesome. Let us further ask ourselves if inside each one of those same dwellings we could not by the same individual effort achieve something better still, not only in attaining the outward order, but the still fairer seemliness of the spirit? This is no Utopia. It needs but that every mistress should recognise her responsibility towards the tiny corner of the world that she has to govern, that she should see that it is in her hands to determine, both in intention and fulfilment, whether her little kingdom shall be a centre of grievance and revolt, setting in motion germs of discontent, or whether it shall be a centre of harmonious co-operation. Let us consider, then, how we may best attain this latter admirable result;

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let us try to put down, in plain language, how we must set about it. Time enough to wonder what we shall do when the race of servants is extinct: let our children wonder that. And let us in the meanwhile spend our time to a little more purpose in wondering why those of us who deal with their servants in a careless, happy-go-lucky, inconsiderate fashion ever find any man or woman willing to remain in such service at all.

It is no easy duty, no light obligation, that of organising the existence of a number of human beings assembled haphazard under our roof, whose welfare depends on our daily decision, and whom custom forbids under such conditions to order their lives themselves. It is indeed an immense responsibility, although many of us bear it with incredible lightheartedness. The pressure of opinion in these days of hygienic knowledge practically compels the well-to-do employers to look to the material well-being



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of their servants: to provide them with adequate food, and not only odds and ends from a better furnished table; to see that their sleeping rooms are large and airy, and the rooms they sit in well lighted and well ventilated, two advantages which have an incalculable effect on nerves and spirits, and to pay them sufficient wages, since the best commodity of whatever kind is never got for the lowest possible price.

It is well that the housewife should consider these conditions essential. But having fulfilled them, it is not well that she should think her obligation stops here. Let her, while regulating the physical atmosphere of her house, care anxiously for that other atmosphere as well, which cannot be regulated by the simple method of counting cubic feet or opening windows at the top. Let the moral atmosphere of the whole be that of peace and serenity, based upon what is well called the "give-and-take" of daily inter-

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course, implying in its best sense a giving forth with deliberate intention of what is desirable, and receiving with self-control the manifestations of others. Many people speak, without intending it, brusquely and discourteously to their servants, and, though they may only do so occasionally, put themselves thereby at a disadvantage. For it is natural that the unpleasing utterance should make an impression where the courteous one does not. One remembers the place where one stumbled over a stone and hurt one's self better than the smooth piece of road where nothing happened. And let us also remember that the actual language of intercourse, apart from the manner of using it, must be taken into consideration. The mistress has presumably a vocabulary about ten times as big as that of her maid, and should therefore be able to convey by the finer, less offending, more skilful shades of speech that which her servants may only

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be able to express in the very baldest and crudest terms. It is from this habitual crudity of utterance, I believe, that the minor dissensions of servants between themselves so often arise. Half the time it is not what is done but what is said, and especially how it is said, that puts the household out of gear, a fact that should be taken into account by those in authority when they are called upon to adjust differences. A wise mistress, however, will interfere as little as possible in insignificant domestic crises: her intervention will thereby be the more effective on occasions when intervention is necessary. But let her be aware, however, even though she may not act upon it, of what is going on in her household. There is sometimes as much harm done by the silence of trusted servants who ought to speak as by the over-communicativeness of those who ought to be silent.

And let not mistress and maid drift towards that repellent form of equality which

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consists in a common interest in gossip, which leads to the latter being permitted, nay, actually encouraged, to retail stories transmitted through other servants about the mistress's friends. It is amazing to find such things tolerated by those who should know better, to hear women of good social position, who appear to be gentlewomen, relating in crowded drawing-rooms gossiping stories which they tell you they have learned from their maids. We can hardly under these conditions expect from our servants that wise and discreet reticence which is lacking in their employers, but is yet one of the few virtues we demand alike from the server and the served. There are some virtues, both of a major and a minor kind, which we demand of our servants, which are made so entirely easy to ourselves by our circumstances and surroundings that it is taken for granted that we possess them, without any effort or any merit on our own part.

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Such is honesty, for instance, in the sense of dealing with other people's possessions without appropriating any part of them; such are cleanliness and sobriety. Again, there are other qualities which are virtues in the servant but that are not required from the employer; of such are early rising, diligence, wearing inconspicuous clothing, obedience, and excess of thrift. There are other qualities, almost more essential in the employer than in the employed, yet demanded from both, of which the very existence in the servant is almost dependent upon their being displayed by the mistress. Such are uprightness, self-control, truthfulness, temperance in the highest sense, courtesy, unselfishness. It is this equipment, more difficult and more uncertain of attainment, that we need therefore to make the greater effort to attain, and to hold up to those around us as attainable. The ordinary employer, no doubt, can only behave in an ordinary way:

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but let those who are more finely endowed set the example of something better. It will indeed be something for this generation to be ashamed of, if women of distinguished and gentle susceptibilities, with their outlook widened and steadied by the knowledge of what great minds have said and thought, with sympathies sweetened by the daily effort to realise and help the lives of others, cannot, even in these unsettled days, make a success of the tiny field of existence within their own four walls, by winning the goodwill of those whom an inequality of destiny has placed in their service.

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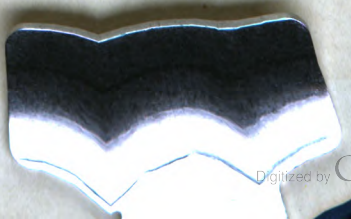

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